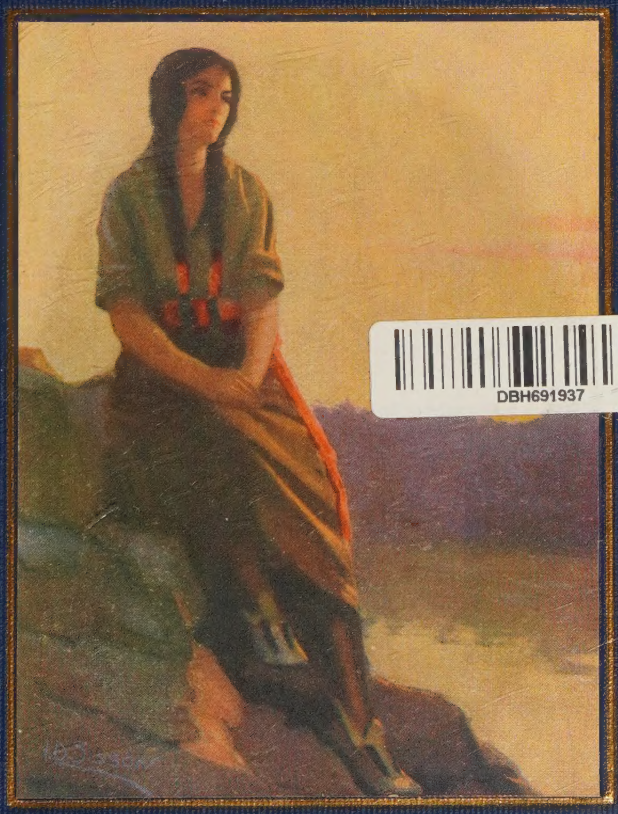
THE GIRL AT BIG LOON POST



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GEORGE VAN SCHAICK

A. R. Sylvester.

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THE GIRL AT BIG LOON POST

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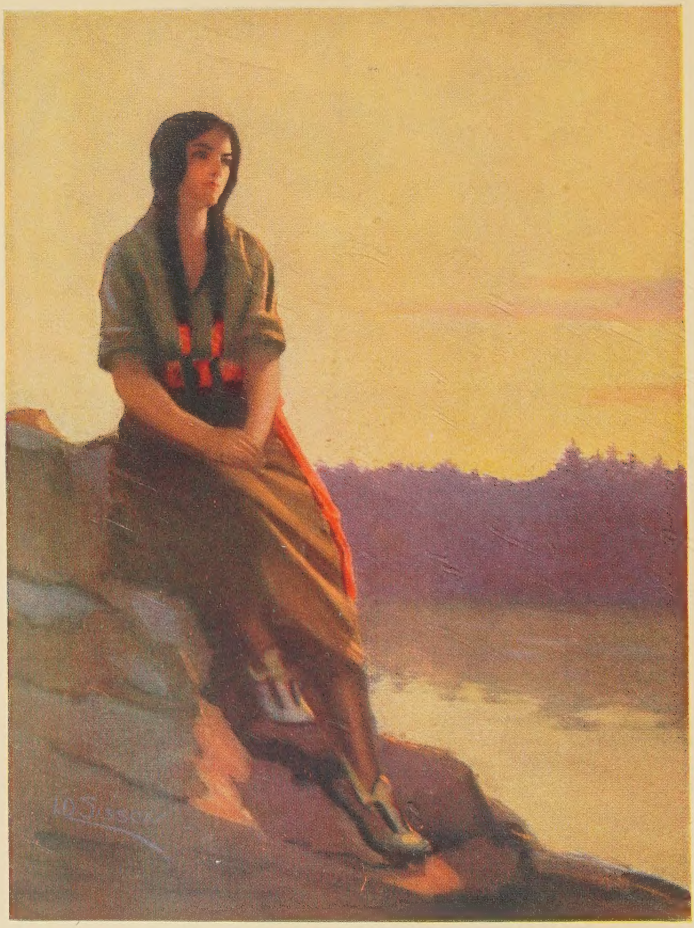

She would sit and watch the reaches to the north, whence he would come hastening towards her. *See page 122*

THE GIRL AT BIG LOON POST

BY

GEORGE VAN SCHAICK

AUTHOR OF "SWEETAPPLE COVE," "THE SON OF THE OTTER," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY

I. D. SISSON

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TO

A. V. S.

MY COMPANION OF MANY WILDERNESSES

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THE GIRL AT BIG LOON POST

THE GIRL AT BIG LOON POST

CHAPTER I

SOWING THE WIND

THE Indians, speaking their own tongue, know the river as Utshishku, but the whites have long since found it more convenient to call it the Rat. The post of the Hudson's Bay Company is at the tail end of nine miles of white water dotted with jagged rocks, entirely unnavigable to canoes. On either bank, at this place, there is some cleared land that is not bad for potatoes and turnips.

From this clearing one reaches the railroad junction by a tote-road, nine miles long, traveled most conveniently by stone-boat or lumber-cart of solid construction. The stream becomes quite wide below the rapids, and in the middle, opposite the post buildings, there is a little island nearly covered

over during spring freshets. In the summer, however, it boasts a reedy growth and some alders bent hard down in the direction of the current.

About the post have arisen a few frame houses and a scattering of nondescript shacks built from the refuse of an old portable sawmill.

One day, late in May, half a dozen men were gathered in the storeroom of Utshishku Post, which was so crowded with goods that it gave but scanty lounging room near the big counter or about the huge stove in the middle.

About them, piled in as orderly a fashion as the abundance of merchandise permitted, were the smaller bags of flour, boxes of biscuits, sides of fat bacon and barrels of pork. There were also cases filled with packages of tea, plug tobacco and condensed milk. On the shelves, that ran all the way up to the ceiling, were rows of gaudily labeled canned goods, bolts of cloth and piles of rough clothing, most of it rather vivid in color. From nails hung shoe-packs and moccasins, dog-harness and fish-nets, Dutch stockings, steel traps of all sizes, coiled copper wire for snares, with many other things useful to trappers and lumber-jacks.

The men assembled were a stalwart lot, with, perhaps, the exception of Teddy Fisk, a man of moderate size but hard as nails and keen as a rat-trap. He was generally reckoned as a first-rate man, and the Indians themselves acknowledged that he spoke Montagnais like a son of the tribe.

All the others, however, appeared as if they could pass with consummate ease the old Hudson Bay Company's test, which required its *voyageurs* to prove their worth by packing over a long carry a load made up of three ninety-pound bales of fur, fastened to the tumpline on their foreheads.

Teddy, his hands stuffed in the capacious pockets of a worn pair of brown overalls, was quietly puffing away at a short pipe as he listened to Boyce Curran, the chief agent in charge of Tshemuak, or Big Loon Post, situated some-three hundred miles to the north as the crow flies. The man had been resentful as to the quality of certain goods.

"I don't say but what it may be so," Teddy admitted, doubtfully, "but this time you're fixed up all right. I've been over the stuff twice and

checked up everything on your list. Them boxes of your own are pretty heavy—all of one man's load. Now, about the gunpowder, there'll be no kick. It's the very best to be had for Injun guns and your crowd up there will find it all right. If they don't, I'll eat my shirt."

"Sure everything's ready?" asked Curran.

"Oh, shucks! There ain't a fish-hook or a spool o' thread missin'. You just get your brigade to work by sunup and load the plunder, and then you can make a start right after noon, makin' a short day of it to shake down everything and let your crew sober up. Most of 'em 'll be sure to get a holt of a bottle or two this evenin', and you'll have to be a bit easy on 'em first day out."

"I've been gone a good long while this time," answered Curran, who had just returned from the Northwest on a lengthy trip for the company. "But I reckon there ain't many of them has forgotten me. They know me all right. If there's any kind of a ruction I've a notion I can tackle 'em."

He straightened his tall form, looking about him disdainfully, and Ted Fisk's eyes narrowed a little.

"In course," he answered, "you'll have yer own way. It ain't none o' my funeral."

Curran turned away from him and stood at the door, which opened on a wide view of the river, scraping away at the bowl of his pipe. The rough, turbid water of the Rat, still heavy with melting snows of the northern hills, must have gone down a good four feet in the last week or two. The birches and poplars were leafing out to a tender green and the little island in the middle of the river was emerging from the flood; the alders, bent by the violence of the swollen stream, bearing among their branches a tangle of flotsam, while there showed small, green patches of coarse grasses, growing in rocky crannies.

"I'm starting just about the right time," he told himself. "We're in for a spell of good weather, like enough, and the water'll be goin' down steady. Wonder who those Injuns are?"

A heavily loaded canoe was coming swiftly. The men swirled it expertly around a jutting sand-bar and guided it powerfully, with strong, deep strokes, with all the force of loin and shoulder. As it approached the landing-place it was gently

brought sidewise to the shore and the two occupants stepped out, quietly, with long moccasin boots half-submerged in water.

They pulled the canoe to safety and strolled up, doing their best to look unconcerned; but their flaming red belts, gay neckerchiefs and "best" clothing indicated that they had come a very long way and, according to usage, had stopped when a mile or two away from the post and bedecked themselves in finery appropriate to the celebration of the end of a long journey.

"Jim Michaux and Passigan," Curran said, as he recognized them. "They've come down from Ushuk Falls to sell their winter's pelts."

"*Quey, quey!*" the men greeted him, as they came up to the building.

"How'd'do?" he answered, shortly. "Good hunt?"

They grunted affirmatively and went into the store where, after shaking hands with Teddy, they asked for tobacco. Then they squatted on their heels by the stove, lighting their pipes with long splinters of jack-pine.

The agent had handed each of them a plug with-

out question of payment. The trading would come in good time. After their smoke they went down again to the shore and lifted out their bales of fur, returning with them and scattering the contents over the counter.

The other men, naturally, crowded about them. Fur is always the one matter of absorbing interest to men of the Northland. They handled the pelts critically and commented upon them while the hunters squatted again, stolid and indifferent of face, but watching the proceedings with furtive, beady eyes.

In the bales there were hides of lynx with black-tufted ears, umber-hued pelts of mink, glossy brown otters, white winter-weasels with black-tipped tails, and many brownish-yellow martens. There were exhibited also the long, gray brown skins of fishers and a couple of chestnut-banded dark wolverines, besides a half-dozen heavily furred spoils of bear.

The two Indians kept up their appearance of indifference, that is commonly nothing but rather transparent acting, and presently the others, having sufficiently looked at the pelts, came to them

and began to make inquiries as to the recent happenings in the up-country, for it chanced that these trappers were the first arrivals of the spring.

Indifferently, or at least very deliberately, although they were mightily pleased at the attention they attracted, the recent arrivals gave the news.

"Yes, we hear that the catch of fur has been fair, but you will see no better pelts than ours," said Passigan, whose Montagnais name meant the Gun. Acting as spokesman he continued, saying that otter was rare up North, this year. The rabbits, fortunately, had been plenty. They had heard that the woman of Pete Memepil, the Tête de Boule Indian with no thumb on his left hand, had died of the coughing sickness, and of course the *ouash*, the little baby, was dead also. Charlie Alakapeshagan's gun had burst and he had lost two fingers of his left hand. The black *pok* was too strong, or he had put too much in the barrel. The ducks and geese would be very plenty for the rivers and lakes were already occupied by many couples beginning to nest.

Oh! Yes. It was true that they had heard that the assistant agent at Tshemuak Post had

taken a wife. She was a very fine girl called Ameou, the Bee, she that was daughter of old Nimissuts, the Nascaupee chief.

"What! Gone and got married, has he? D'ye really mean that he's gone and married her?" interrupted Curran, excitedly.

"Up by the rapids of the Many Birches we met Father Gregoire, the *manitou-ilno*, the priest with the long white beard. And he told us that he had been to Tshemuak and had married them according to the way of the white man. Therefore it is so," put in Jim Michaux, who, in spite of his French name, was a very dark and pure-bred Montagnais.

Boyce Curran bit his lips and his pupils contracted. He had frequently cast his eyes upon that girl, who was certainly the best-looking young woman of her race he had ever seen. He remembered that she was rated second to none as a worker and a maker of the finest moccasins, also that she was straight and lithe and soft of voice.

"The—the devil he has!" he muttered, angrily.

He no longer cared to listen to the unending gossip of the Indians. He was impatiently hack-

ing away at a plug of black tobacco, and growing angrier all the time.

"What made the dern fool go and marry her, anyway?" he asked himself.

A couple of lanky wolfish dogs outside the building began to bark and he glanced out of an open window. A man in a rickety buggy was arriving, the wheels bumping hard over the rough road. He drove a spavined horse clad in rope-mended harness.

"Here's yer letters," he said to Fisk. "The blessed train were two hours late an' I got stuck in that there Drumleigh swamp. The corduroy's all gone ter pieces and the mud that deep 'tain't fit for no man or hoss ter travel on. I thought th' old sorrel'd sure break a leg afore he got through."

The grouchy old fellow got out, paying not the slightest attention to his steed, since he was perfectly aware that it would never move without a tug at the reins and the use of strong language. He carried a worn leather and canvas bag which contained the scanty mail for the post and the few adjacent dwellings.

"Ef they don't go ter work and fix that there

condemned road pretty soon," he kept on grumbling, "ye'll be glad ter get yer mail once a week, lettin' alone twict."

Nobody paid the slightest attention to these statements, repeated as they were at every trip. The contents of the bag were of much greater interest.

There were some impressive and official-looking envelopes for the post, a few newspapers and nonedescript matter for a few of the settlers, which, however, were all seized eagerly, as was everything that came from the outside world. At Big Rat even a patent-medicine almanack was deeply appreciated and passed through many hands.

"Hello there, Boyce! Here's a letter for you, bears the Winnipeg postmark. And there's two more for Loveland, which ye'll take charge of for him. He'll sure be glad to hear from his folks at home. I was kinder feared there'd be nothin' for him afore ye left. What's this? Oh, it's a paper for me from across the water. My brother he sends it when he thinks about it. Ye can open it an' read the news while I see my letters. I've a

notion marten's goin' to be high, this year. Bear's way down."

Boyce Curran opened his letter, which proved of no special importance, and placed those he was to take to Loveland in his pocket. Then he sat down on the steps of the porch and leaned against one of the swamp-cedar pillars.

He lit his pipe and tore the wrapper of the paper Fisk had handed to him, to peruse the long columns. There was a lot about the Parliament in London, which drew from him a long yawn. News about the Balkans, which he judged to be some outlandish heathen country, interested him just as little. He persevered, however, turning over page after page without the slightest show of interest, vainly looking for the report of some good prize-fight or murder. It was all most dreary and tiresome, and yet he continued, hoping to find something worth reading, and his eyes finally fell on a long column of death notices. Idly he ran down the list.

Suddenly he sat up very straight, his indifference utterly vanished. He looked carefully again,

scratching his head vigorously, paying no heed to the cap that fell to the ground.

"Surest thing in the world!" he told himself. "There can't be no mistake! That's the name all right. I'll eat my shoepacks if it ain't that old cuss of an uncle of Loveland's that he's told me about so often. Don't it beat all?"

Curran took out an old dingy pocketbook and carefully copied the notice, using a stubby stump of lead-pencil. After this he folded the paper again, and returned it to Fisk. Later on he stood up at the desk, behind the counter, and wrote a letter to Quebec, which he mailed.

Shortly after this the Tshemuak agent strolled off into the tiny village, where some ragged urchins stared at him, and idly watched some repairs that were being made on the little sawmill. But he soon had enough of this and went out on the rough lumber road of which the mail carrier complained so bitterly. To an outsider he looked like a man having a lot of trouble to kill time, whereas, as a matter of fact, he was most deeply engaged in thought. After he had gone perhaps a half a mile

away from the post he sat down on a prostrate tree-trunk and pulled Loveland's letters out of his pocket, turning them over and over in careful scrutiny.

"Told me to open anything that might come for him," he justified himself, "so that's all right. Of course if he hadn't I'd have had to steam them open—so he's just gone and saved me that much trouble."

Loveland's instruction to open the letters was very natural. At Tshemuak there seldom occurred more than three chances in a year to send out any mail. Hence it followed that if Curran read the correspondence he might be able to send some sort of answer at once, instead of making the people at the other side wait perhaps a half a year. Curran had seen some of these long criss-crossed missives; they generally related uninteresting gossip and advice to return to England. This time, however, he suspected, since he had seen the notice, that more important matters might be revealed to him.

The first letter he opened was an affectionate one from Loveland's sister, relating the advent of

a new baby and urging him as usual to cease burying himself in a wilderness. She also stated as a postscript that she had just heard that Uncle David was very ill.

It was the second which made Curran sit up excitedly. It came from a firm of London solicitors, advising Loveland of a considerable interest he had in his uncle's will, and stating that the exact amount would only be known after an inventory of certain securities had been completed. The lawyers advised him to return to England as soon as possible, since his presence would greatly facilitate all matters.

Curran read the stilted, formal letter several times, and kept on staring at it. Of course he had heard all about this uncle. When a couple of men are immured together for months and years, in the back of beyond, they are likely to exhaust every possible subject of conversation. The chief agent doubtless kept some things to himself for a man is surely the master of his own secrets. His companion, however, full of youthful candor and trusting his senior, had withheld nothing from him.

Hence the chief agent had heard all about the death of a rather extravagant father who had impoverished his family, leaving a daughter married to a struggling clergyman and a son so ill-provided for that he had been obliged to leave the university and look for a living. The uncle had offered to help, but under conditions that would have been utterly distasteful to the young man. The wealthy merchant would be glad to make a place for his nephew in the business house in London—a dark and ancient building about as old as the hills.

Loveland shuddered at the mere idea of a grubby place that savored of everlasting dampness, of walls covered with row upon row of old account books, among which toiled shabby-looking clerks who wore green shades over eyes grown weak for the need of sufficient sunshine. During the recital the young man told Curran how he hated dingy offices, however rich might be the firm that occupied them. The very air in them seemed to be doled out parsimoniously. His idea of life was to go out in the world where the winds of heaven were unconfined, where men did their work

in the open and the sweat of their brow fell on good sweet-scented earth.

Hence he had drifted away to Canada.

"Yes, and now the old cuss is dead," Curran repeated to himself. "He's left something to Loveland. It ought to be a pretty good pile. What's that they say? 'It will doubtless amount to a very handsome competency.' Let me see, how much did he say the old man was worth?"

He was trying to remember a conversation of a year or two before. It was surely at least a hundred thousand pounds. Yes, he was very sure it was pounds and not dollars. May be it was two or three hundred thousand. At any rate the whole thing had sounded like a fairy tale, just as big as the Hudson's Bay with a bit of the ocean thrown in.

And now, by thunder, Loveland had gone and married that Injun girl, and could know absolutely nothing about this new development, and would hear nothing of it for another year or so, providing the mail didn't get to him!

The man stared before him, paying no heed to the chattering red squirrels, entirely unconscious

of the passing before him of a big cock partridge with black velvet ruffs outspread. The world had changed for him; the outlook was no longer one of dense lone forest and far-stretching waters.

He had rather wanted that girl for himself. But—Loveland had gone and married her and she was his wife, actually married by a priest instead of having been taken under some loose and easy form of agreement with some old Indian, only too content to exchange his daughter for blankets and the agent's favor. Yes, she was the fellow's wife, just as much as if her skin had been white and her upbringing that of a civilized woman. And since she was his wife she had an interest in whatever that old curmudgeon in England might have left to her husband!

This notion struck Curran all of a heap. He stopped his vicious whittling at a piece of pine.

"Thunder! What a chance!" he exclaimed, as he threw away the wooden splinter. "Loveland would leave all he has to his wife. That's the kind of a fool he is. And then, supposing something was to happen to him—upset in rapids or lost on the barrens, or—or he meets with some ac-

cident! Then the bloomin' Injun girl owns the whole shooting-match. Then maybe she marries again, and her husband makes her sign anything he has a mind to, and then he puts his finger in the pie. Naturally she'd be only too glad to marry again and live in a house and get all the grub she wants—no trouble about that."

He pushed his slouch hat back on his head and passed the back of his hand over his brow, that was somewhat denuded of hair, though he was scarcely over thirty years old. His long black moustache drooped over the corners of his narrow lips, and his intense preoccupation deepened into furrows, the lines running from the sides of his nose to the ends of his mouth. The face, indeed, was a rather handsome one, but marred by the shiftiness of his deep black eyes. His expression was hardly a pleasant one as he rose, looked about him and walked rapidly off towards the post.

When he reached the main building Ted Fisk was outside, scrubbing his hands and face before a three-legged stool supporting a tin basin and a cake of yellow soap. The local agent's two children were playing near by, the boy astride a saw-

horse which he pretended to ride at a mad gallop. Boyce Curran took off his mackinaw and had his turn at the wash-stand for men of the woods are commonly a cleanly lot.

Ted's wife, a motherly, cheerful creature, served the two men with pork and beans and hot pancakes, to be washed down with strong tea. Her doughnuts were famous and the hungry men did justice to them.

"Pretty near the last of good grub for a while," remarked Curran, as he rose from the table.

"You don't ever look starved when you get back from Tshemuak," laughed the housewife.

"Maybe I don't," he answered, "but I got no notion to keep on livin' on sourdough bread and fat pork all my life, that's sure."

He lighted his pipe and went out on the porch, where he sat for a while, quite lost in his restive thoughts.

Not far away, from a barn in the middle of a big field studded with blackened stumps, came the sound of an accordion. After a time Curran rose and strolled towards it, standing at the open door.

Paul Chambord, a fat Frenchman, was perched

on a barrel and was squeezing his instrument lustily. A few women and a score of men were in the maze of a country dance, moving with the energy characteristic of the amusements of lumbermen and *voyageurs*. Already a few of them seemed to have had all the cheap liquor that was good for them.

"I'll make some of you sweat, beginning to-morrow!" Curran murmured between his teeth. "I'll try some o' that grease out o' ye."

He declined civil invitations to join in the dance and strolled back to the post, where he sat on the porch for a long time, heedless of hungry mosquitoes, until Ted Fisk and his wife came back from the dance.

"I've been tellin' them lads that all the *voyageurs* ought to be gettin' to bed," said the agent, "but of course they'll be up most all night and be played out in the morning. You can't learn 'em no better."

"Don't matter. They'll be worse played out when I get through with 'em," announced Curran, decisively, whereat Mrs. Fisk shook her head and glanced at her husband.

CHAPTER II

MASTER AND MAN

Curran had gone to bed fairly early, after consuming nothing stronger than black tea, but when the alarm clock he had borrowed from Ted Fisk clattered him awake, he hardly looked like a man who has enjoyed a long night's sleep in perfect sobriety. His thoughts had hindered his slumbers, and he arose with eyes prickling and an evil taste in his mouth. Yet he leaped out of bed quickly, for the hard job of rounding up his men must be begun at once. Before the last of the stars had faded away, while the moon had sunk below the jagged tree-line and the faint glow of approaching redness began to rise over the deep-toothed outline of dark conifers, he was lacing his shoe-packs, after tucking the bottom of his trousers in them. The icy water of his tin basin, plentifully splashed over face and neck, awakened him to entire activity and he felt himself again when

he descended the creaking stairs, very resplendent in attire. On a day of departure it behooves a chief of brigade to put on some style, so that when he opened the door-latch he was wearing new, high, black moccasins, tied above his calves with bright, red, tasselled cords, so that the soft leather might not slip down—at least in theory. About his waist he had wrapped a gay sash and the collar of his blue flannel shirt was fastened with a bright neckerchief elaborately tied in front. His woollen cap was gaudy with many hues.

At the end of the first day's journey, of course, most of this finery would be packed away in his war-bag, to come forth again whenever he gave the men a half a day's rest on Sundays, and also when they should come in sight of Tshemuak Post, several weeks hence.

He hurried away from the main building, where Mrs. Fisk was already lighting a fire in her kitchen stove, and reached a dilapidated shack, the door of which he pounded with his fist.

"All right! Coming!" sounded a gruff voice. A moment later the rough door of planks was thrown open and there appeared before him a

sharp, bleared face surmounted by an untidy shock of hair falling over the ferrety eyes.

"Ready in a minute," said the man, calmly. "Come in or stay out, just as ye want ter. Just got to pull my boots on. Them new shoepacks o' mine is a tight fit."

He went indoors but soon returned and stood before Curran on sturdy, bowed legs, showing bulging arms that nearly reached his knees. His body was bent askew and his head was deeply set between heavy, broad shoulders. He was commonly known as Mashkaugan, the hunchback, owing to an accident in his youth, when a spruce trunk had fallen across his back.

Yet the muscles at the sides of his neck, trained by the tug of the tump-line, stood out in massive columns. The whole make-up of the man indicated tremendous brute force. Those best able to judge deemed him a wonderful man in a canoe.

"Come along now," said Curran, sharply. "We've got to rout out those chaps in a hurry. They've had all the fun that's coming to them for a while."

They met a few men who were making their way

towards the post, and bade them hasten. Several more were dragged out of bed, none too gently. The remainder of the brigade was finally rounded up and brought to the landing, where they slaked their devouring thirsts with copious dipperfuls of icy water. These were the *voyageurs* who constituted the crew bound for Tshemuak Post, a motley lot of French Canadians and half-breeds whose language was a jumble of Montagnais Indian, English and French.

The long canoes, with high sterns and bows, were lying on the shore, turned bottom up. They had been carefully searched for leaks and gummed over the day before. A little vermilion paint mixed with the seal-oil and spruce gum, for greater beauty, gave the long joints between layers of bark the aspect of great bloody scratches. They were brought down from the bank and, in the dark water that steamed with the promise of a warm day, were put afloat gently, for an injured canoe may mean loss of life and goods, and is certain to cause a waste of time.

Ted Fisk was up and carried a lantern. He opened the big padlock securing the door of the

shed in which the loads for the brigade had been placed. The amount, to one unfamiliar with such things, would have looked positively formidable. Taking his position by the door-sill he checked every package, box, bag and roll of blankets as it was taken out.

Men at the landing were placing poles and alder branches at the bottom of the canoes to keep the merchandise from getting wet if water was shipped aboard or rain fell, and scattered a few balsam boughs over them.

On the floor of the shed the loads were being made up. A couple of hundred pounds per man would suffice for the present, since many of the *voyageurs* were none too steady on their legs. Their faces, as a rule, pictured that sadness of the morning after first displayed by Noah.

The long thongs were tied about bags and boxes, Curran and Fisk lending a hand from time to time. The men, fitting the headpiece over their brows, would lean forward with a grunt, bend over from neck to hips, and stagger away with desperate effort.

"I'll have 'em juggling with three bags o' flour

apiece, in a week or two," said Curran, grinning. "There won't be tallow enough to grease a boot on their bones, I'll wager."

Ted Fisk nodded, with a quick side-look at him, and kept up the careful inspection of his list, until all the hundred pound bags of flour, the kegs of powder and the rest of the stuff had been taken out and piled on tarpaulins laid on the shore, close to the canoes. After this the two men went down to the river to superintend the stowing of the goods. This proceeded rather slowly, for the men were none too lively after the previous night's dancing and the cheap high-wine they had absorbed. From one canoe to the other Curran ran, directing, ordering and swearing at the men. One of them faced him.

"We have one load terrible for dis voyage," he complained; Curran moved toward him with flaming eyes, wherefore Ted jumped forward and gripped his arm, tightly.

"Easy, Boyce, hold hard! You haven't got 'em away yet. I had a hard enough time getting a gang together for you, and you can't do a thing if they take it into their muddled heads to say

they're damned if they'll go. You ain't on Hudson's Bay now by a long sight. Better give 'em a little time. They're bound to grumble but they'll get on all right if you don't hustle 'em too hard at first."

Curran was compelled to feel that there was wisdom in these words, and, perforce, had to let up a little in his driving. Finally all the heaviest stuff was stowed away and the men were called to breakfast. At this function appetites were decidedly below par, although the huge pint cups of tea proved stimulating and grateful. The men drank the bitter stuff greedily and asked for more.

After this they carried down the pork, the pails of oleo and jam, the rolls of netting twine and so many other things that it did not seem as if the five big canoes could possibly carry them all.

Yet it was all finally loaded in, and, after this had been accomplished, there was a profound study of each canoe and corrections were made when a craft seemed rather too far down at bow or stern, or listed to one side or the other. The proper balance of such a craft is all-important, and may be considered as an art requiring much expertness.

Once obtained, the correct loading will always be maintained, the men remembering unerringly where every box and bag is stowed.

Before eleven o'clock everything was ready. Mashkaugan, who was second in command, returned with the men towards their shacks and tents, where their personal outfits were ready packed. A number of them had wives to bid good-by to, and the hunchback carefully saw to it that the adieus were not prolonged.

Like the breakfast, the noon meal failed to prove an attractive feast, for mouths were still very dry and muscles sore from the unwonted hard toil after a period of idleness. Also there could be but scanty joy at the prospect of a long journey under the orders of such a driver as Curran; but finally the entire population of Big Rat Post, including the dogs, had gathered on the sharply sloping bank of the river. From a distance a few cows, switching away flies, also observed the preparations for departure.

Curran bade the agent and his wife good-by and, after throwing a swift glance over the entire outfit, entered his craft. Mashkaugan held the

stern paddle of his canoe and a chap called Jacques Clairay, who would act as chief on the return journey, was in the bow.

The dignity of a chief of brigade did not permit Curran to use a paddle. He waved his hand to the people on shore and the journey began. On the banks a few guns squibbed off some sort of salute, half-heartedly, and in the boats a few men tried, in a discouraged way, to lift up their voices in song.

"Hit 'er up better'n that, Mashkaugan! This ain't no bloody funeral!" commanded Curran sharply.

The hunchback started in, the loudness of his voice making up for woeful lack of quality:

En roulant, ma boule roulant!

The chorus was taken up and a semblance of cheerfulness finally seemed to be attending the start. Until the procession of canoes rounded a long point in the river it continued, the boats keeping well inshore near the line of alders, where the current lost some of its swiftness.

"Well, Sue, I'm glad they're off at last," said

Teddy Fisk to his wife, as they slowly returned to the building.

"I've a notion something's going to happen to that there Curran some day," answered the good woman. "He's too hard on his men, he is."

"Well, he's a hustler and he gets the results," replied her husband. "That's what counts in the long run."

"Maybe it does, but men ain't dogs," said the wife, quite unconvinced, as she entered the shed to get out some feed for her chickens, while the agent returned to the store to begin a long haggling with Michaux and Passigan over the value of their bales of fur.

Meanwhile the brigade kept on going up the river, the strong current and high water making their progress very slow. The day was a warm one and the sweat was pouring from the men's faces, stinging their eyes, which they wiped with a quick move of their wrists, never losing a stroke excepting when they lifted their paddles with blades high up in the air and allowed the water trickling down the loom to run into throats dry and parched. After going a couple of miles they

stopped at the side of a little brook running down from a sidehill. The ice-cold water refreshed the men amazingly. They struck matches and lit their pipes, starting up a long, dead water, where the current was easier, and presently, at intervals, the songs were heard again.

An hour before nightfall, after covering a bare nine miles, the brigade went ashore at the foot of the first portage, where the big river tumbled over a mighty fall. Curran would have started some men with loads over the carry, but Mashkaugan advised against it.

"Well, never mind," assented Curran, at last. "The whiskey's pretty well sweated out of 'em by this time. Just look at 'em hustle. They want their grub and a long sleep."

"Yes, they're all right enough now. I'll get 'em started early over the portage," replied the hunchback.

The men were lighting fires and putting up the tents, while canoes were unloaded swiftly by the hungry crew, who piled up the goods on shore and covered them with tarpaulins, anchoring the corners with heavy rocks.

After this there followed many long days, with the constant passing of well-remembered landmarks—Point of Birches, Black Rocks, Dead Pine, Drowned Man's Pool, and scores of others that marked many hard, long steps on the journey.

Then came the country at the height of land, where there were many hard portages, some of which they had to tackle in pelting rains, during which moccasins sank deep in swampy ooze and the strain of the tump-line became a torture, while the sting of black-flies and mosquitoes irked them day and night. Then they came to a region of little crooked streams where the deep-laden canoes would hardly float and the whole brigade would be halted until trees that had fallen across could be chopped asunder.

In other places the men would have to walk in swift running water and drag the canoes over shoals by main force, but the trend of the current was now to the north, and began to help them towards Hudson's Bay. By this time they knew that there would be no more hard lining from the shore, as had happened so many times further

south, when a dozen men would be walking along the bank, toiling painfully at the long tow-ropes, while two canoe men with poles kept the craft in midstream and watched out for threatening rocky heads.

Mashkaugan and Curran had created a carefully nurtured rivalry among the men. In their hearing they coolly discussed the men's abilities, believing this, doubting that. Like a parcel of big children the *voyageurs* fell into the old trap and sweated under huge loads, going fast, each one trying to show superior ability.

Some of the carries took an entire day, for the portages would have to be traveled back and forth a number of times until the whole freight was brought across and loaded for another start.

Many of the nights were hot and uncomfortable. We are prone to think of the winter as a time of trial for the dwellers in the northern wilderness, yet in summer they are ever longing for cold and the crackling snow, for freedom from the pests that assail them night and day, for the hunting that is only good when intense frost has made thick and heavy the fur of predatory animals, and

the meat of others keeps sweet for weeks and weeks. Now, at night, they were compelled to keep tent flaps closed tightly and the men slept with sweating heads kept covered, at times, for neither white man nor Indian can withstand the fiercest attacks of hordes of hungry insects blowing in like clouds from the swamps, which sometimes seemed to care nothing even for the pungent, acrid smoke of smudges with which the travelers sought to repel them.

At such times they rose weary in the morning, grumbling fiercely and gesticulating wildly, but they were becoming accustomed to Curran's driving. These evils, after all, were such as they had been wonted to all their lives, and, as far as the chief was concerned they began to pay less heed to his urging. Better than any one else they knew when they had accomplished a fair day's work, and the leader was often compelled to keep his temper in check, knowing how swiftly sheath-knives can be drawn and short axes handled by angry *voyageurs*.

Nearly every night Curran, whose dignity required a private tent, would call Mashkaugan and

engage in long conversations with him, always ending with talk about Loveland, at the mere mention of whose name the hunch-back would spit angrily on the ground.

"I ain't no friend of his," he said one day. "He —he can go plumb down to—to the devil; me and him we don't get along."

"Well, that's a fact. I know you don't cotton to him; but then I know that it was on account of a cross-fox pelt that disappeared there was a fuss between you, Mashkaugan."

"He called me a dirty thief, he did, and other names."

"That wasn't a bit polite, of course, but between the two of us I'll say it looks as if he knew pretty well what he was talking about, mate. Of course I ain't stuck on him myself, but I've got other reasons. But *you* must be awful careful, you know. Some day you might run up against something a lot worse than a long swim on a big river. Mighty cold work, wasn't it? D'ye know, there's times when I wonder if Loveland's got some notion of where ye're wanted? Once or twice I've suspected it's come to his ears, somehow. Like

enough he may be thinking of sending you back there."

Mashkaugan remained silent, but his eyes flashed in anger. He remembered vividly a night, four years before, when by dint of fierce toil and wonderful cunning he had managed to burrow his way and surmount obstacles that kept him in a place in which he was detained for questionable practices in regard to selling liquor to Indians. Glaring into the fire that burnt before the tent he could see again the iron-barred, narrow windows and the walls outside upon which men walked, up and down, carrying loaded guns. The patience he had displayed was incredible and the amazing shrewdness of his plans, with his skill in carrying them out with sudden tremendous energy, during which he had half killed a guard, had led him in the darkness to a place on a high bank, down which he had scrambled and slipped. Again he saw himself, most vividly, as he swam away with the current, in tell-tale clothing, in the middle of a great river upon which boatmen with flaming torches were searching for him.

Then, as he had begun to strangle for breath,

numb with the chill of the water, and was drifting helplessly, his head had bumped against a moving log, and he had clutched it and driven his nails into it, tearing them to the quick—and a man had pulled him out and laid him on the raft, while his breath came and went with a gurgling sound.

And the great drive of logs had gone on, fast, towed by a puffing tug, and the man had concealed him under a tarpaulin while boats boarded it and other men searched in vain. At this very minute the man who had rescued him was sitting at his side,—Curran, who had chuckled long over the good trick he had played on prison-guards.

Soon afterwards they had parted and it was only two years later, in a far-off place, as he looked for employment on a north-bound brigade, that the two had recognized one another. Curran had scratched his head, uncertainly, as the man stood before him, pale and anxious. But this uncertainty had lasted but a moment and Mashkaugan found himself engaged.

"You keep your mouth shut and like enough I'll do the same," Curran had whispered to him. The man had just obtained his appointment to Tshe-

muak Post and they had traveled up there together. It did not take the hunchback very long to discover that he was paying for his rescue, for every word and beck and call had to be obeyed under the penalty of vague hints of that awful prison.

So great was his dread that he found it easy enough to comply. At this very moment he knew that among the boxes they were packing into the north were some containing pure alcohol, which could be sold at a hundredfold its value in priceless skins. Also he was aware that on the down trip several of the latter had been hidden in Curran's pack, of which the trusting company would never hear.

"That there Loveland's altogether too finicky to suit me," Curran declared, whispering. "There's times when he's badly in the way, and he's like enough to get the both of us in trouble. If you and me, Mashkaugan, could have the run of that country to ourselves it wouldn't take many years for us to make a nice little stake. Then I'd go off to a white man's country and live like a gentleman."

"I don't want the big places," objected Mash-

kaugan, somberly. "One of 'em was enough for me."

"Of course! You think they might still be glad to see your ugly mug again, don't you? Well, you wouldn't have to go to those places. There's any number of little ones where no one'd know you. Anyway they think you were drownded and ain't looking for you. A fellow could take up a bit of land and grow things and live comfortable, or maybe have a shack somewhere and sell the hot stuff, all safe with a license, if he only kept his mouth shut and didn't give himself away."

In the middle of nights when they could hardly sleep owing to the incessant attacks of the winged pests; during periods of rest on hard portages, when loads were put down for a minute to relieve the intolerable strain on back and loins; on rarer occasions in the evening when they strolled away from the camp to catch a mess of fish to relieve the sameness of the fare, they always returned to their conversation about Loveland until Mashkaugan, a credulous and intensely superstitious man, began to consider the assistant agent as a bitter enemy lying in wait for him. Curran would watch him,

quietly, playing on his fears, kindling again his doubts and suspicions, insisting on the prospects of wealth and ease lying in the hollow of their hands, if only they might be free from a sneak who would spy on them. He kept the hunchback rubbed the wrong way, night and day. It became a game, an amusement likely to prove profitable and help out his plans, and during hours of silence he devised other moves, over a great board crossing the ocean and reaching into a city where wealth had been hoarded for his ultimate benefit and meant a life that he vaguely understood but felt was infinitely desirable.

By this time the streams were becoming deeper and wider, day by day, as rivulets and other rivers came in to join in the race to the great inland lake of salty waters that is Hudson's Bay. The flat barrens, deserted of life but for a few waterfowl, spooky in their unending vastness, in the mournful sameness of never-changing horizons, among which they spent sodden days of constant rain, again became dotted with clumps of trees while the rivers grew swifter and the banks rose higher and became rocky again.

At first the hills were low but they came to higher ones among which forest trees grew thickly. They passed through many lakes where, if the wind was not ahead, it was pleasant to paddle for long spells without having to watch for hidden sharp boulders. In these lakes their trolling-spoons brought out great fish, forked-tailed trout of deep waters, great northern pike, and the golden scaled pike-perch whose light, white flakes, fried in pork fat, made a worthy addition to the meals.

And the days kept on growing warmer, though a frosty night came now and then. By the reedy edges of ponds or shallow rivers fluffy broods of ducklings began to appear. Those fairly grown flapped away from the boats in mortal terror, while younger ones dived among the reeds and hid themselves while the mothers flew away in another direction, slowly, helplessly, as if sorely wounded, only to rise in the air, farther on, when certain that they had turned pursuit away from their broods, and wheel back again.

Finally, thirty-one days after the start, which was mighty fast going considering the huge bulk of the loads, the brigade, singing merrily, with

all hardships forgotten, eagerly made for a level spot on the right bank of the Tshemuak, or Big Loon River.

The men hurried ashore, pulling war-bags after them, which they opened and searched feverishly, pulling out bright neckerchiefs and scarves, gaudy sashes and their best clothes. They scraped their faces; Jacques Clairay obligingly shortened some lengthy heads of hair with a pair of shears; men owning but a single pair of pants repaired rents in them with pack-thread.

An hour later they were afloat again, singing lustily, with little memory of the hardships undergone on the long journey. As they turned a bend in the river they saw the buildings of peeled logs and a few tents scattered on the shore.

Curran put a couple of cartridges in his shotgun, loaded with noisy black powder, and fired them off in the air. At the post a flag climbed up a high spruce pole and there came answering detonations. Men and women, with children, came running out to the landing-place. Dogs barked angrily, that would soon fawn in welcome. A young woman, shading her eyes, stood on the sill of the

main building. A man, light haired and of fine looks, took her by the hand, and together they walked down to the beach. The man, happy and laughing, waved his hand. He was no longer feeling the long exile, but these were friendly canoes, with news from the great world outside, fresh from contact with the edge of civilization.

CHAPTER III

WHEN LOVE CAME

Loveland, fresh from the closed-in life of town and college, at first reveled in the grandeur of the northern forests. They were full of things unrevealed to him, hardly suspected. Landing in Canada with but few dollars in his pockets he had taken the first work offered to him. In turn he had dug ditches, driven a rickety stage, stoked a forty-foot steamer on a big lake, to drift finally further and further into the lumber country, where he had come in contact with the drivers of logs and the hewers of wood and obtained some inkling into the mysteries of trapping. At a station of the C. P. R. he had fallen in with an agent of the Company, the Big John Company for which regiments of men gather fur, from the St. Lawrence to above the Arctic Circle. Here, for scanty wages, he had worked as an assistant, selling calico and thread and needles to dusky women, handling

bags of flour and heavy cases of tobacco and learning the alphabet of the fur trade. Then, suddenly, had come an opportunity to go far north and he had pounced upon it. There the months had slowly grown into years, and the time came when the loneliness of it made his head ache and his eyes were beringed with darkness for the want of sleep—for the longing to mingle again with such life as never comes to the wilderness—for books and the mixing with men busy with the toil and the thought of a great world.

In the early summer he was busy with trading, with the packing of the furs that were to adorn fair women of civilization. This, naturally, brought visions of refinement, a glamour of bright lights, remembered impressions caused by soft voices and pretty raiment, until sometimes he wandered away from the post and sat down upon some fallen trunk, or flood-worn boulder, and his soul cried out for all that he had left behind. But he was a healthy, clean, normal man and gradually time and distance brought greater ease and dulled sharp edges, so that he plunged again into

his work, haggling over peltries, giving out provisions, pondering over the credits to be allowed departing trappers. Diligently he studied the Montagnais language, making friends with the people, and brought a cultured man's intelligence to the acquisition of deep knowledge of the life of the wilderness. At home he had learned how to shoot. In the wilderness he became expert in the handling of an axe, clever in a canoe and, in course of time, found himself able to steer a true course through the mazes of deep woodland and swampy barren. Also he became a good judge of the value of fur and, somewhat against the grain, became a good haggler over prices.

It may be well to remember that Tshemuak was a place in which the company reckoned that every pound of flour cost it about sixteen cents, owing to the expense of transporting it over hundreds of miles of which every one represented fierce toil on the part of men built like sons of Anak. The sellers of pelts, also, were used to demanding far higher prices than they were prepared to accept. They showed skill in concealing defects in pelts,

and would have held in secret contempt a man unable to match himself against their wiles.

It was the long winter that irked Loveland's soul, however, and the terribly low temperatures had little to do with the process. He was closed in with a man who, in spite of all his efforts, proved a companion with whom he could find nothing in common. The Indians were all away hunting, with the exception of an old couple and a lame boy who served them rather weirdly. Week after week, month after month, the hours dragged wearily. Big game was scarce about the post, and, except in the light of food, its pursuit was hard and undesirable as an amusement.

When enough fresh meat was stored up, and after the few worn and dog-eared books and magazines, read over scores of times down to the smallest advertisement, fail to interest any more, life sometimes becomes a burden. At such times even the old pipe may come to taste bitter, and is often taken up merely as an excuse for something to do, only to be laid aside half smoked.

The darkness of the northland made very short days, which the young man found all too long, and

interminable nights during which he would rise, replenish the stove, and play games of solitaire till he stupefied himself into more sleep, which was better than the irking of soul that was becoming too great to bear. The strength of his hale body and the education of his mind seemed like added burdens. He thought bears were lucky to lie unconscious under the white pall.

The talk of the two old Indians was always the same; they grunted out some form of greeting to him, twice a day, did the necessary work about the post, commented on the weather, and silently enjoyed the good fortune that enabled them to doze away the remainder of their time, hugging the hot stove. He sought to teach the lame boy, who soon showed that he considered education as a superfluous and wearisome accomplishment, and never got beyond the first dozen letters of the alphabet, being rather weak in mind. Loveland counted the days to the open season, when the brigade would come, and perhaps an occasional visitor, generally Indian, for the missionary appeared but once a year.

It is likely enough that for a while he was ac-

tually struggling against the madness, insidious and of slow growth, which is born of the waste places. It may, however, have been but the simple longing which comes sooner or later to every man that bade him look wistfully into the open tents of Indians preparing to summer at the post.

He watched the women at work, and the babies fastened to padded boards, swinging like strange fruit from the limbs of near-by trees or suspended to the ridge poles of tents. He looked upon those at their mother's breasts and followed the play of boys armed with blunt-headed arrows and the occupations of small girls who were helping their mothers with the household work. From the door of the store-room he watched the movements of young women and studied their faces, noting how they handled short axes or sewed shoepacks or bent over the fires among the pots and pans.

When he had first come into the wilderness Loveland imagined that the Indians were a most inferior, degraded lot. In a few instances, and especially nearer to civilization, his views might have been correct. But many of the people who

came to Tshemuak were handsome, splendidly built people, so far superior to himself in all that concerned life in the woods that he sometimes had to acknowledge a sense of inferiority on his own part. Insensibly he became friendly with them and kindly in his mode of treatment, a fact they had been quick to appreciate. At the going out of the ice during the previous spring, but a few days after Curran had departed to be gone a long time, Nimissuts, or Thunder, an old chief among the Nascaupees, which constitute a tribe related to the Montagnais and speaking the same language, arrived with his wife, who had young children, and his daughter Ameou, born of another marriage.

Walking behind her father the girl had entered the storeroom, each of them carrying a heavy bale of fur. Loveland dropped the scoop with which he was measuring out salt, to look at the attractive young woman, whom he remembered well enough. There was a difference, however. During the previous year he had considered her as little more than a well-grown child, showing signs of early blossoming into womanhood. But now,

like many plants of the northland whose growing seems to take place with breathless haste lest the summer may prove too short, she had added to her stature until she was tall and gracefully rounded. Her soft, dark, long-lashed eyes no longer sought his with the engaging frankness of childhood, but were downcast in maidenly modesty. She had been very fond of him, owing to gentle ways he had with young folks.

To Loveland she appeared as a sweet, fresh vision which brought to his mind a vague notion of surcease to his dreadful loneliness. Her lithe grace and dusky beauty seemed to fill the log building with something that had never yet penetrated it. Her soft voice was like music more charming than any he had ever heard.

For days, after this, he watched her, and during the nights her image came before him and left him with a great longing, so that he began to speculate as to what his world would say to a marriage with this girl; how such an event would make his return to it forever impossible. Then he would tell himself that many white men had married Indian girls who had made good wives.

Still, such alliances were tantamount to a deep burial of any desire ever to return to a civilization in which the darker faces of other races are held in more or less tolerant contempt!

But then what prospect was there of his ever leading again the grubbing, narrow life that is incompassed within brick and stone walls? In spite of the fact that the loneliness of Tshemuak was killing, he realized that, after all, the wondrous freedom—the greatness of the waters and the depths of the forests—held him in thrall. Why had he suffered? What was it that had weighed upon him and well-nigh crushed him? The answer came forth, clear, evident, forcible. It is not good for man to be alone!

Only a companion was needed, one whose presence would bring brightness and affection and constant, tender care. He had not missed Curran very much, a man of coarse fibre, of rare laughter that was rasping in sound, of profane language that only offended him as an evidence of bad taste, and wont to speak of men and of women in a cynical, contemptuous way. Tshemuak was all right enough. One's needs were few and there

were no opportunities for the spending of even his rather meagre salary. He might be getting but an ordinary laborer's wage but he was in a position of trust and responsibility. He had been a fool to think of ever going back to be lost in a crowd of men ever fighting for a place in the sunlight that beat down on crowded places where the atmosphere was tainted.

He sought the girl, openly and frankly, speaking with her before all. Also he sat before the campfire of old Nimissuts, smoking his pipe, while the girl busied herself, beading moccasins or making clothing for her small half-brothers and sisters. There is no doubt that his eyes must have carried some message to the girl, for Ameou began to be glad when he came. Her own were kept lowered, as a rule, and her cheeks flushed a little when he spoke to her.

One evening the woman Anishku, the young wife of Nimissuts, was speaking to her husband, who was placidly smoking a long-stemmed pipe. She pointed to Loveland, who was strolling back to the log houses.

"Hast thou noticed?" she asked.

"My eyes are becoming old, yet they are still able to see," he replied, slowly.

"The young man Uapishiu, he of the yellow hair," she continued, giving Loveland the name by which the Indians usually called him, "is looking for a mate, and his eyes have fallen upon Ameou. He wants her for his woman."

The old man nodded, very deliberately, but made no answer.

"Her hunting-ground is good and worth many pelts a year," she said, referring to the fact that, among remoter tribes of Indians, the women are generally the owners of the hunting rights. "See to it that thou demandest enough for her when the time comes."

She was a practical woman, with an eye to the main chance.

"I have been thinking that these white men come here to live for a time, and sometimes take our women and live with them till the day comes when their own places call to them. Then they go away, promising to return with the next brigade. But they never come back, for doubtless they find other women of their own people. It

shall not be so with Ameou," said the old man firmly. "I have in mind the daughter of Peshu, she that killed herself, and a girl of the Fox tribe of the Montagnais, who lost her mind and wandered away, seeking the man who never returned."

"Some men go away," observed the woman, "but others are taken away in blizzards and high floods. Some are overcome by the cold or are crushed by the falling of trees. Always a woman runs the chance that she may be left alone. Yet if this should happen to Ameou she would be left with more than if she had taken one of our own men, and perhaps could marry again. Also she might be able to help us greatly."

Nimissuts nodded again, striking the bowl of his pipe on the toe of his shoepack. He felt that there was some wisdom in the woman's speech but made no further answer, since it is not befitting a man to take too much heed of a woman's chatter.

Loveland, unconscious that his affairs were already being discussed far and wide, continued his attentions, which gradually took the form of wooing. He now occasionally followed the girl into the woods and met her, as if by accident. Little

by little his words, at first subdued and tentative, became stronger and ardent. The young woman uplifted eyes that seemed to search his soul—and she would smile before looking down again at her little moccasins.

Came a day, far in the deep woods, when the glow of the setting sun fired the tops of the trees with lambent flames of gold and red and purple, and Loveland spoke again. He slipped an arm about the girl's waist. Her forehead nestled on his shoulder, and he heard the softly spoken words:

"*Tshe shatshiitin.* O Uapishiu!"

He knew that it meant "I love thee," and he took her in his arms, crushing her to him for a brief instant. When he released her she fled like a deer to the tents of her people, and he followed.

For many days Loveland had to possess his soul in patience while he bargained with the young woman's family. For three years he had hardly spent a cent of his salary, and he might have consented much sooner to their demands had not the girl Ameou counseled him apart, for his interests were now her own.

Things were nearly settled when one day

Father Gregoire, the traveling missionary of the Oblates, landed at the post with his two Indian acolytes.

"Now the time has come," said Anishku to the old man. "The ancient bearded one is the Manitou Ilno, the Medicine man of the white people. The joinings that he makes can never be broken. He has said so many times, and therefore thy daughter Ameou will be very safe. Hast thou not heard him say in our tents that his medicine is such that the people bound together by his magic words are bound together for life? Seek thou young Yellow Hair and tell him thou hast decided to give in, in the matter of that red blanket, but that he must cause the Manitou Ilno of the whites to say the words over them."

The old Nascaupee hastened to follow such excellent advice, and on the following morning Father Gregoire, who had overslept a little, hastily pronounced his benediction, boarded his canoe, and paddled away to the north with his young men, for there were many tents to visit. That summer was a delightful one, during which existence took a greater and higher meaning, and, to

the man and the woman, brought peace and happiness. When the cold weather finally came all the Indians scattered away to their hunting grounds, leaving the two alone, except for the presence of old Cyprien and his wife Anne, the two Montagnais who did odd jobs about the post and lorded it over the cooking-stove.

A couple of dogs represented the remainder of the population, for the boy had left. The two animals, Loveland had once thought, had been all that stood between him and insanity during the previous winter. This time, however, the young man anticipated the coming of the frost with perfect equanimity. By her mere presence his wife had transformed the place. He never tired of looking upon her beauty or watching her at her household work. Hardly had he dared to hope for more than a quiet, submissive woman who would do his bidding pleasantly while showing some appreciation for the comfort of a life far easier than she had spent in the trapping camps.

Now, however, it was a constant subject of grateful wonder on his part to find that Ameou's

had become a deep, genuine love. Whenever he chanced to leave the house for a few hours it was a delight to see the brightening of her wonderful dark eyes on his return. No longer were the evenings utterly stupid and irksome. Ameou was teaching him the Montagnais language, bewildering in its multitude of declensions, and he made rapid progress. The girl knew a little French but he taught her English. She was also learning how to read and write, and he wondered at her quick intelligence and excellent memory. Indeed it seemed as if her shapely head had been full of little spaces, hitherto unfilled, in which she now swiftly stored new things.

From time to time Loveland went away hunting with the dogs, harnessed to a toboggan bearing his provisions and destined to bring back a load of meat, if chance proved kindly. Occasionally he found caribou on the big barrens beyond the river's valley, to the eastward. Their meat, carefully prepared, with the whitefish that had been netted and salted in the fall, was an invaluable addition to the stock of food. A little trapping near the post brought in a few pelts. Ameou gen-

erally went with him and showed him mysteries of which he had never dreamed.

She had a way of making wet-sets for foxes that was wonderfully effective. The bait was hung from a sapling bent over a shallow pool. In the middle of this she made a tiny island no bigger than a man's palm, most convenient for a fox to step on; but it concealed the trap that was set just under the water, beyond the power of the animal's scenting. Neither did the tracks of the trappers leave any betraying odor, for the soles of their moccasins were rubbed with an aromatic oil that concealed all trace of man.

Much as he taught the girl during their long evening lessons, Loveland realized that she also gave him invaluable knowledge in the ways of the wilderness. And so the time passed, until at last the nights began to grow shorter and the wild geese, far up in the sky, came sailing on their way to Hudson's Bay, their "*a-honk, a-honk,*" clanging bell-like down to earth. Then other water-fowl began to arrive, and a few chirping birds, as the birches and poplars leafed out while the lakes cleared of ice and the rivers first roaring

turbidly with the melting of the great snows, lowered their waters which once more became clear and mirror-like or passed in creamy froth over rapids and great falls.

Then the nearer families of Indians began to return, and life at the post became quite busy, as the winter's catch began to pile up in the storehouse, the sorted bundles of peltry hanging from rafters. The return of the brigade began to be looked for—the one great yearly event. It would mean news from the outer world; also it would mean the coming in touch with people who had just mingled with some sort of civilization.

The older Indians commented on the weather, and studied the height of water and the strength of the current. At first they counted the days, but the time came when every one who came from the post or out of a tent would first turn his eyes to the southward, lest perchance the long canoes might be in sight.

Yet Loveland, who had always been so feverishly eager in other years, was more indifferent to their coming than any of the others at the post. Provisions and a new stock of trading goods were

evidently needed; but his world was very well filled just then and he had lost all vain longings for impossible things.

One forenoon an old Indian ran up to the post, excitedly, and proudly announced that he could smell smoke coming on the southwest wind proving conclusively that people must have lighted a fire at the old stopping place just beyond the bend in the river.

The Indians all came out of their tents and stood upon the bank. Some of them had taken unusual care in the matter of their attire, in honor of the day. They sniffed the air, gesticulated, laughed merrily, if they were young, or remained in stolid silence, if older. The few women detained in their tents by household cares kept running out and peeping at the river, with eyes shaded by brown hands.

Presently, after impatient waiting, the high bow of the first canoe appeared as the craft rounded the distant point. It took the sharp vision of the Indians to decide at once that it was undoubtedly a big Company canoe. Then followed another—and a third and fourth—and the last. After a

time, as the boats came on fast, the men paddling with great vigor and helped by the current, old familiar songs were faintly heard.

Then came the double booming of a gun, and the Indians on the shore, always glad to make a noise, burned expensive black "pok," as they called gunpowder. With shouts and the waving of caps they greeted the arriving *voyageurs*.

The landing, of course, was quite a formal affair. First ashore was the canoe of Boyce Curran. Jumping out in the shallow water his men drew the craft sidewise against the bank, after which the chief rose and stepped on dry land, putting a hand on a man's shoulder. Most heartily he extended his arm, approaching Loveland, who met his grasp and welcomed him warmly.

"This is Ameou, my wife," the young man announced simply, indicating the girl, who was standing beside him.

"My congratulations, old man; she's become a beautiful lady," said Curran, taking off his *tuque* and bowing with a rather exaggerated show of courtesy. "Thou hast become a fine grown woman, Ameou," he added in Montagnais.

"I am the wife of Lawrence Loveland," she replied, proudly, in good English.

The man glanced at her, keenly, and a swift smile passed over his thin lips.

"Well, let's go to the post, old boy," he said. "It's too bad there are no letters for you, this time, but they say no news is good news. Anyway I brought you some books and quite a bunch of magazines, but they'll keep until I open my pack."

Loveland looked disappointed, for a moment. Before his marriage he would have been very unhappy at such news, but now it did not seem to matter much.

"Thanks," he said; "I'll be glad of the books."

He began to speak at once of the fur he had bought, while they strolled up to the post, while Ameou followed at a short distance.

"That wife of yours is keepin' you in cotton batting, ain't she?" said Curran, interrupting. "Them's wonderful moccasins you're wearing, and that buckskin shirt is great, for sure."

"Yes, I am very happy," answered Loveland, quietly.

In the meantime the men of the brigade, helped by the Indians, slowly began to unload the canoes. They stopped often, chattering like magpies, giving and asking for all sorts of news. Some stretched themselves on the bank, happy in the good rest they would be able to enjoy until the bales of fur were made up and gathered for the return journey, a matter of at least a couple of weeks, for all the hunters had not yet got in.

Mashkaugan, leaning on his paddle, had been following the two men with his eyes, his brow wrinkled and frowning.

"One too many," he told himself and spat on the ground.

Then he turned to the *voyageurs*.

"Get to work and unload," he shouted. "You'll rest later."

The men became more active. Another procession was soon formed, the men clambering up the bank with great loads and dumping them down cheerfully into the storeroom, for these back-breaking packs would never have to be carried again, while the loads of fur for the return journey would be ever so much lighter.

Curran entered the main room of the post and cast his eyes around, conscious of a cleanliness and order that had been somewhat unfamiliar during the housekeeping of the two bachelors. Mashkaugan, a moment later, came in with the chief agent's war-bag, which he put down on the floor.

"Say, Ameou, you might unpack my bag for me," said Curran, after the hunchback had closed the door behind him.

"I beg your pardon, old man," put in the younger man slowly. "She's Mrs. Loveland now, you know, and old Cyprien can attend to it for you."

"Oh, yes; it don't make any difference," assented Curran, pulling out his knife and cutting tobacco in the palm of his hand.

CHAPTER IV

TO A FAR COUNTRY

THAT evening, after supper, Curran and Loveland were smoking their pipes on the little porch facing the river. A brisk, pleasant breeze from the northwest was keeping the flies away. They had drawn a couple of home-made chairs from the big living-room and were discussing a very important matter. Away from them, nearer the water, the *voyageurs* were scattered about their tents or sat about a bright fire of birch-logs, talking volubly and laughing. Doleful sounds were being teased out of an old fiddle, but the audience evidently appreciated what passed for music, having little inclination to be unkind and critical. Dogs nosed around, in hopeless yet ever renewed search for bits discarded from the meal. A few women stood up, close to the sitting men, listening to their talk. The many babies were hushed in sleep.

"Now the instructions from headquarters are

plain enough," Curran was saying. "They told me that one of us was to take a canoe, or a couple of 'em if we thought it necessary, and take a good look at the country east of the Ushuk.

"The idea is that they have a notion that there's a bunch of heathen Nascaupees up there who don't do much trapping and just live off the country. I don't know what darn fool put it into their heads, but it's like enough, anyway. Of course we know there's some of 'em get down to the Labrador coast with pelts, but the free traders get most of 'em. If the Ushuk trip isn't too hard, some of 'em might be induced to come down here and trade. Or else, if fur seems plenty in that country a post could be established up there.

"That would be if the traveling was good, of course. Between you and me and the nearest lamp-post,—that must be in Quebec,—I don't think much of the idea, and told 'em so, but them old codgers get set in their notions, and it's a case of go, look, see and make a report to head-quarters."

He was talking in an offhand, desultory fashion, as if he had deemed the matter of slight impor-

tance, yet his keen eyes sought to penetrate the darkness and watch his assistant. There was something cat-like in his expression.

The younger man did not answer at once. Under the conditions formerly prevailing he would have been only too glad to spend a couple of months in exploring the country, but the prospect of leaving Ameou was exceedingly distasteful to him just then.

There was no reason to prevent Curran's taking hold of the undertaking; but, of course, the man was just in from a hard trip and entitled to a rest. Moreover, he was the head man at Tshemuak and supposed to remain in charge, besides which the journey, if taken at all, must begin at once.

"Mashkaugan would be the best man to take along," continued Curran. "He's hard as nails, and there ain't a man anywheres to touch him as a *voyageur*. Says he'd be glad to go. I know you've had to set him down good and hard once or twice, but it's done him good and he'll be all right now."

Loveland had never cared for Mashkaugan; yet there was no question that the surly half-breed was

by far the best canoe-man on hand—strong as a bull, a hard worker and familiar with all the dialects of the country. His intelligence, in many ways, was of a shrewder kind than prevailed among most of the *voyageurs*. Any opinion he might give regarding fur and the possibility of transportation was to be reckoned with seriously.

"Oh! By the way," asked Curran, indifferently. "Have you any liniment at the post? I got a rather bum knee from falling on rocks. Of course it don't amount to much. Not even bad enough to make me limp. I reckon it'll be all right in a week or two, but it bothers me some now."

He rose and took a few steps, as if to try the injured leg, and gave the knee one or two rubs.

"I guess it'll be all right soon," he said.

Curran did it most cleverly. He had taken every care not to exaggerate his effect.

"Yes, there's a big bottle on the shelf," answered Loveland. "I daresay that the hurt won't amount to much, as you say, but of course you can't take chances with it and use it too much. You'll have to rest, naturally, and there can't be

any question of your going, for it might go back on you. I suppose I'd better make ready to start day after to-morrow; I'll make out a list of the grub to take along. I suppose you've brought some cartridges for the 38-55, as I asked you to?"

Curran nodded. His cold and nearly imperceptible smile had come again. He was pleased with the deft little touch which had decided the falling of the scale. Yes, it had been a neat idea!

"I should like to take my wife along," said Loveland. "She likes to travel and is just as good as a man in a canoe, but now it's out of the question, of course. I'm afraid the poor girl's going to feel pretty badly over this."

Curran nodded. In a way, circumstances were helping him.

"Well, I guess I'm going to turn in," he said, yawning. "A good bunk is going to feel pretty fine after a month of sleeping on the ground."

But before he retired Curran sought out Mashkaugan and had a short earnest talk with him, and the hunchback grinned, evilly.

Loveland, under the starlight, strolled down

to the bank of the river with Ameou, where they sat on a big prostrate birch, and spoke to her of his intended journey. The girl's pretty face became very serious, her smile disappearing, and she put her hand on the man's shoulder.

"This is foolishness," the young woman said. "Ask my father, he knows all the country of the Ushuk, and there is nothing there, unless a man should go so far away that no brigades could ever reach the land from this side. It is true that men must have told the Company things that are not so—but it is an order, like many others that are not wise, and you must go!"

"Yes, I am afraid I must," he assented.

"You will go, though it hurts me here, in my heart," Ameou continued. "I know it is the place of women to stay behind and wait when they cannot help. Yet I am much disturbed in mind for I fear something. What it is I do not know."

"Well, I am taking but the chances of all long trips," observed Loveland. "I certainly hate to leave but my only reason for this lies in my love for you, since I cannot see that there is anything to fear."

"The Nascaupees of the eastward country will do no harm," said Ameou, quietly, "for they are harmless people, even those who have never seen white men. Nor do I fear rough waters, for thou art now a strong man with the paddle and the setting pole, and a swimmer like *nimak* the otter. But always remember that the strongest swimmer is nothing when he falls in swirling water that seeks to rend his limbs apart. Yet I have little fear of those things which may befall one in the wilderness, because strong men must take their chances at all times. But that which I fear I cannot find words for. It is something like the heaviness of the air and the black stillness of the deep waters and the hushed songs of the birds when a great storm is coming. But it may be that my love is so great for thee, and my sorrow at thy going, that black thoughts lie heavy upon me."

In the dusk of the brief northern summer night Loveland could barely see that her eyes were moist and her lips trembled. Yet her voice was calm as she spoke in her own language, that is full of soft inflections and knows only "thee" and "thou"

in addressing others. She came from generations of people inured to great hardship and was seeking to meet it bravely.

"It does not seem to me that anything in the world could ever come between us two," he answered. "Surely the great happiness we have found together can have no brief ending, and the beautiful years are long before us. Thou fearest only because of the pain in thy heart."

"I hope so. Yes, it must be so, and thou willst return to me, my man, the father of the little one that is coming," she answered, somewhat brokenly.

They remained seated together for a long time in the stillness of the night, which was broken only at intervals by the cry of some night-bird or the splashing on the dead-water of rising fish or diving muskrat. Also there was the rising and falling of a gentle wind among the shivering poplars, but it sounded rather like the soft breathing of a sleeping world.

At last they slowly returned to the building, downcast, the woman's heart full of forebodings she could not understand. The man swallowed

hard at the sight of a tiny garment Ameou had been fashioning with loving care.

The next day, however, passed swiftly, the two men working in the big store-room. An account had to be drawn of all the goods remaining at the post and an inventory of all that had just been received. These things had to be stowed away on shelves, piled in orderly fashion on the floor or hung upon pegs driven in the walls.

Then a careful calculation had to be made of the provisions that would be required for the feeding of the returning brigade, which would be commanded by big Jacques Clairay, a reliable man from the Lake St. John country. An Indian desirous of seeing the world and fond of travel had been found to take Mashkaugan's place in the canoe during the trip to the south.

The woman Ameou spent some hours over her husband's sixteen foot canoe, a light one, easy to carry, which she had made herself of a bark of splendid texture and very free from knotholes. She heated the seams with a small bark torch and covered them with a smooth layer of spruce-gum melted in seal-oil, that makes it pliable and pre-

vents cracking. To doubtful little places she applied her lips, sucking hard in order to discover the tiniest holes, but she was unable to discover any leaky spots.

Loveland wrote a number of letters, long ones such as a man indites when he can communicate with friends but once or twice a year. They spoke of the new happiness that had come to him and, perhaps unknown to him, revealed how firmly he was now bound to the great free life of boundless horizons and wondrous, silent wilderness. These letters were carefully done up in birch bark, to keep out the damp, and were to be mailed, many weeks hence, on the brigade's return to Big Rat Post.

It was quite late at night before they all stopped working. The pelts which Loveland had already traded in, that spring, were brought out, carefully counted and estimated, after which they were baled up and made ready for shipment. Curran noted down the prices that had been paid, in order to guide his dealings with other returning trappers. There were still a couple of weeks of trading ahead, for a few distant parties were

still expected to turn up. Except for them the brigade would have been sent away at once, with but a scanty period of rest.

The young man slept but lightly that night, and whenever he awoke he was conscious that his wife was watching, silently, sobbing softly from time to time like a child who is weary after much weeping.

Mental suggestions brought by his wife's fears, perhaps, brought to him brief, restless dreams, in which she was torn from him by engulfing smothers of waters crashing down swift rapids. He awoke and touched her, with a sigh of relief, and her hand rested for a moment on his own, bringing peace again.

But in the morning Ameou's eyes were dry, if ringed with darkness, and she moved about bravely, packing his water-proof canvas war-bag and showing him where she placed the things that would be needed most frequently during the journey. The breakfast was served at break of day; it was a hearty one and better cooked than those old Anne used to turn out, Curran observed, knowing that Ameou had given it her own attention.

Mashkaugan sat at the table, devouring vast quantities of food, in utter silence; but Loveland, in spite of all his wife's urging, found it hard to swallow.

"Now don't you be worrying about anything," Curran was saying, in the hearty manner he so well knew how to assume. "You won't be gone over a couple of months, if that long, and you'll be back weeks and weeks before the cold weather comes. I'll take good care of everything, you bet. If you make up your mind that the going is too bad, and the two of you decide the country's no good, come right back. It's no use considering anything that can't be worked by a brigade.

"Up to Mukumeshu Lake it's all right, that we know, since there's quite a bunch of Indians coming down from there every year. But they never tell us anything about any but the big north branch that comes into it. They don't seem to know anything about the other two rivers, and those are the ones you ought to look over pretty careful. You've got all July and August before you, and there won't be a thing to bother you but flies. Sure ye've got some of that oil of tar with you?"

The young man nodded. They had already discussed all this over and over again; but like all men who live in the wilderness and have few matters to talk about, they thrashed over every detail to the utmost. The hunchback listened, without a word, occasionally wiping his mouth with the back of his hand and sniffing.

"You take darn good care of him, Mashkaugan," Curran addressed him, "or I'll pull the hide off you when you get back. Don't you let him do nothin' venturesome."

The fellow sniffed again.

"Sure," he answered, gruffly.

Curran had risen from the table, and took up Loveland's gun, pretending to look at it carefully. His open manner gave no inkling that he was not an honest man giving the very best of advice to a dear friend, yet, several times, Ameou looked at him, puzzled by a strange feeling that everything was not clear and above board.

The time to leave was now at hand. Loveland threw the strap of his pack over his shoulder, since it was hardly worth while to adjust the tumpline to his forehead for the short journey down

to the river. Ameou followed, carrying the repeating rifle.

The provisions had been expertly stowed in the canoe by Mashkaugan, who was waiting quietly, his pipe in his mouth, ready for the start. Finally the husband and wife drew to one side.

"Remember to tarry no longer than the end of Opou Piishum, the month when the velvet leaves the caribou's horns, which thou callest August, for at the beginning of the month of falling leaves—but thou knowest! Have no fear for me! I shall be brave, and wait patiently, and it may chance that the father and a little son may come together. Great will be our happiness then."

He smiled at her tenderly and pressed her in his arms, bidding her good-by again and hurrying to the canoe.

He was about to step in when Curran came up to him.

"By the way, old man, I don't like to put my oar in," said the chief agent, "and you can tell me to shut up if you want to. I won't take no offense; but I've a notion, so long as you're going

off on a pretty big trip, you'd like to fix things up a little for your woman. There's money coming to you from the company, whenever you want to draw it, and if anything happened to you it would be easier for her to get it if you made some sort of a—a will, you know. Of course there ain't no real need for such a thing, but I thought—"

"By Jove, Boyce, but you're a good fellow," exclaimed Loveland, gratefully. "I'd never thought of it and it's a mighty good idea. It ought to have come to my mind, but we've been so confoundedly busy—come up to the store with me, it'll only take a few minutes. I still have about a hundred pounds of my own in England, too, besides that salary I've left with the company."

They ran back to the post. A peculiar smile came again to Curran's lips.

Loveland hunted up a sheet of paper and sat down at the big board table, a local product of the cross-cut saw, where pelts were generally spread out for inspection, and began to write with a rusty pen. That which he put down was brief:

Being of sound mind and about to undertake a long journey, I hereby leave and bequeath all I may die possessed of, of every kind and nature whatsoever, to my beloved wife Ameou, christened Marie, daughter of Nimissuts, a Nascaupee Indian, and declare this, before witnesses, to be my last will and testament.

LAWRENCE LOVELAND.

"Let me see," he said, after he had added the date, "I have no doubt that this will is all right, though I don't know much about such things. But it must be witnessed, and if the witnesses should ever be needed they might be hard to get at. I think I'd better ask every man here who can scratch his name, then some of them could always be found to swear to it."

Among the Canadian *voyageurs*, hastily summoned, Clairay and five others were able to affix their signatures, after a fashion. Mashkaugan bluntly said that he could not write, which was not true, but Curran wrote his name at the bottom of the page with a fine flourish.

"Looks like quite a document," he commented, admiringly. "They can't never go back on this,

I'll bet. Seems to me it's copper-bottomed and riveted on the inside."

"I'm sure I hope so," declared Loveland earnestly. "I'm ever so glad you suggested the thing. You might as well keep it for her. Lock it up somewhere. You see, she might not realize its importance, if—if the unexpected happened."

"Just as you say, old fellow. It's only a kind of a fool thing, anyway, and won't never be needed, of course," answered Curran, lightly.

"You'll put it away with the books," said the young man hurriedly. "I've wasted a lot of time and we ought to have been gone nearly an hour ago. Well, this time I'm off for good!"

They hastened down to the landing once more, where Loveland had to shake many hands and receive good wishes. Then he entered the canoe, taking the bow paddle, and dipped it into the stream.

Mashkaugan jumped into the stern, lithe as a great cat, and shook one foot that had been in the water, for every drop and every grain of sand that lodges between the ribs adds weight on the portages. After a hard month's work a canoe may

"I think I 'd better ask every man here who can scratch his name, then some of them could always be found to swear to it." *See page 83*

increase by ten or twelve pounds the load to be carried.

When they reached the middle of the current, where the water ran most swiftly, Loveland and Mashkaugan turned and waved their caps.

The young wife remained on the bank, long after the boat had disappeared around a bend and she had last seen a dear uplifted hand. Other Indian women came to her, after a time, and spoke gentle words of sympathy—for they understood. She did her best to smile at them but could not trust herself to speak. They noticed how bright her eyes were with tears that did not fall, so bravely did she hold them back. Finally she arose, her face again tranquil and showing little indication of the sorrow that was upon her, and returned to the post building, where she began to gather up all of her clothing and blankets, with the tiny things she was making for the coming child, the little one of Uapishiu of the golden hair. With her belongings she arrived at her father's tent, whereupon the old man grunted; but his eyes glinted at her in approval and the father's wife greeted her in welcome.

Curran had been busily engaged in the storeroom, which was separate from the main building, and only returned to the latter in time to see Ameou carrying out the last armful. His eyes followed her, in some surprise, till she disappeared in the tent.

"Wonder what the devil she's up to?" he commented. "Looks pretty near as if she was robbing the house and taking everything out to that old rascal Nimissuts. I'll have to take a look."

He walked over to the tent and waited until the young woman came out again, empty-handed. He had decided to be civil at first. He must always remember that he was going to marry that girl, some day, when—

"Why didn't you get the old man Cyprien to help you?" he asked her. "You ain't fit to be lugging a lot o' stuff like that."

"It is not very much," she answered, looking straight into his eyes. "I have taken nothing but my blankets and my clothes for now I am going to live in my father's tent until Yellow Hair, my husband, comes back to me."

"But what do you want to do that for?" he

asked, rather sharply. "You'd have been more comfortable in the house. The old people would have taken care of you."

"*Eshi lakala tutagants*," she replied softly, in the familiar words that signified that it was a custom of her people. "It is here I am to wait."

"Well, you know you can always have all the grub you want from the store," he told her, trying to speak pleasantly. "I'll look after you all right. Come to me for anything you want. Wouldn't you like some cotton stuff for a new dress?"

"I know what I may take," she answered quietly. "My man Uapishiu has given me the full tale of all that I may have. I am to write it on a piece of paper, and also write my name on it, so that he may know I took it."

Curran turned on his heels, to conceal his vexation. Of course the girl would help herself without asking him. There was an old padlock, somewhere, but it was never used, for the people were honest. He strolled back disgruntled, for it looked as if the girl had made up her mind, from the first, to have as little as possible to do with

him. Of course he could have locked up the storeroom, and then she would have been compelled to come to him for everything she needed. He even went so far as to hunt up the old rusty lock but had no sooner found it than he threw it aside. It wouldn't do.

He was now in a wilderness where the greatest crime known to man is the robbing of a cache. Never, since the early days when Tshemuak Post had been established, had anything ever been kept under lock and key; nothing, even to the value of a penny, had ever been stolen. The returning hunters, who lived out their summer close to the post, were not models of all the virtues, by any means, but thieving was not one of their vices, and they might resent such an unusual precaution. They were as yet quite ignorant of many of the ways of civilization, but Curran knew that in some matters they were just like children, and prone to a sudden anger that might result in their folding up their tents, some day, and quietly departing to some other posts—even all the way down to James' Bay, for to such rovers one or two hundred miles more or less matter very little.

Every one knew that posts, hitherto very prosperous, had occasionally been deserted with remarkable suddenness, having been abandoned by the trading Indians for reasons that might appear absolutely futile. Curran knew that the mere statement by some old buck that the white man was locking up his doors because he feared that some one was a thief might prove sufficient to send them all away, never to return.

Curran watched himself carefully, henceforth. On every possible occasion he did his best to treat the young woman as pleasantly and courteously as he could; but for days at a time she seldom appeared, remaining within the tent—which he could not enter without an invitation from the old man —or else she was away somewhere in the woods, possibly snaring rabbits or partridges, or gathering herbs for sickness.

Many times he came and sat with old Nimissuts on the big log that had been rolled close to the campfire, and asked the ancient chief to share his plug of tobacco. Nothing loath, the old chap would help himself, plentifully, and return the plug, gravely. Nimissuts at all times was very

sparing of words. All questions put to him were briefly answered, and his seamed face always remained like a graven image.

As the days wore on the agent began to grow restless and nervous. At times he would watch the river, to the northward, very intently, as if he expected an arrival. For a couple of weeks he had been kept very busy, as the latest parties finally arrived, but finally they were all accounted for, the brigade had departed, and a long period of idleness had begun. Some of the hagglings with the trappers had been somewhat shortened by his temper, that was none too good, and had scarcely turned to his advantage. He felt sure he had given too much for martens, and the thought made him angry.

The time began to drag heavily for him. During the day he worked at the winter's provision of fuel, when the spirit moved him, or took his .22 and hunted small game, but the hours were long in the post building, at night, and he smoked too much strong tobacco and rose with an evil taste in his mouth.

In his restlessness, one day, he went again to the log upon which the old chief sat.

"What do you know of the country of the Ushuk, where Yellow Hair and Mashkaugan have gone?" he asked him.

"I know it well, and thou knowest it also, and the trip is a foolish one. There is but one river of the Mukumeshu that has good country where there is fur, but the other two go into waste places where there is little game—where it is far easier for men to die than to live. But the white men surely know their own schemes best, though to us they sometimes look *aueshish*, stupid, but it is not for me to say."

"I wonder if the old devil suspects anything?" Curran asked himself, uneasily, as he returned to the post. Then he went into his own room and diluted a little pure white alcohol with water and drank, alone, till confidence of a sort returned.

CHAPTER V

ON STRANGE WATERS

At first the distress of parting from Ameou was very keen, but travel in the far northern countries is no child's play, and the toil of it took some of the edge from Loveland's pain. After a week or two of it he actually began to find some enjoyment on the trip. It was a great change from the daily routine of the post, and the end of each day found him weary enough to permit of sound sleep. Then there was the constant delight of seeing new places, of camping each night in a different spot. His mind was quick to appreciate the grandeur of scenery during the long days of paddling up rivers, and by the shores of lakes, whose every winding and jutting point, once passed, revealed new beauties.

As they went on they quickly investigated tracks of game on the sand banks along the shore, for their abundance or scarcity was of importance.

They took mental notes of landmarks, estimated distances, studied the trend of currents, the length of dead-waters and the extent of rapids and falls. By the side of Mashkaugan, Loveland's knowledge of the wilderness was trivial, yet he had learned a good deal and exercised his memory to the utmost.

But soon the taciturnity of his companion became tiresome. Hardly a word ever came from him excepting as a short answer to questions. The young man took a keen interest in the folklore of the Indians, and sought to gain information from Mashkaugan. The mere mention of beliefs and superstitions held by the savages caused the hunchback to withdraw further into his shell. It seemed to make the half-breed *voyageur* very uneasy, and the young man gave it up.

One day they had reached a place known as the White Rapids, where the river dashed turbulently for several hundred yards before engulfing itself in the chasm cleft through a granitic hill. Just beyond the cañon it leaped fiercely into a foam-flecked black pool where great rocks overhung the water.

"Wonder if a fellow could get down there," said Loveland, looking down admiringly from a shelf of rock, over which they were portaging. "Some great old trout in there, I daresay. By Jove! What a place for those windegos and other Indian devils to gather in and plan torments for the spirits of departed men."

He was impressionable, easily moved to the sense of nature's grandeur, and was somewhat awed by the wonderful majesty of the scene, but the hunchback, standing beside him by the loads they had put down actually shivered.

"One must not speak of such things in a place like this," he answered uneasily. "Let us take up the packs and go."

The young man had looked at him in surprise. It had become quite evident to him that the strain of white blood in the *voyageur* had never prevented him from remaining under the influence of the superstitious fears that prevail among northern Indians. Loveland bethought himself of tales he had heard. They were of the fabulous *atshems*, man-eating monsters, for sorcerers of all kinds had formerly spread broadcast the belief in

such beings. The good Manitou and the bad were engaged in eternal warfare. Skulls of beaver and especially of bear were planted on poles to propitiate the spirits of dead animals. To the older Indians all things of nature were sentient and articulate; the very leaves of whispering aspens and of birches could speak and betray the hunter's presence to the objects of his chase; the roaring of waterfalls held a deep and hidden meaning; the voice of thunder spoke of the wrath of gods. It was no wonder that traces of such beliefs should still affect the minds of ignorant men; and the tincture of religion given them by passing missionaries or the priests of little churches in settlements often served but to complicate their beliefs and mingle the old with newer mysteries.

Given the readiness with which, in the heart of civilization, no one will admit yet every one will at times fear the presence of ghostly beings, Loveland could but look indulgently and comprehendingly upon his companion's bent of mind. The man worked hard at all times, never sparing himself. His judgment, in the passing of hard places,

in the avoiding of peril, was nothing short of admirable. Never was he wearied; at all times he was ready and eager to go on.

They had hastened over the portage and resumed their journey. Loveland was wise enough to allow Mashkaugan to decide upon every course of action. He was an experienced *voyageur*, quick and strong of body, in spite of his deformity, with an amazing ability to solve every one of the problems constantly encountered during travel in the wilderness. The young man himself, also of sturdy body and possessed of a keen intelligence, had been quick to grasp all the essentials, but he recognized that in the woods the hunchback was his master. Mashkaugan knew this also, but he never seemed to take any advantage of it. His few words of advice would be grunted out briefly, but always with at least a semblance of respect.

When approaching some dangerous rapid the man would stand up in the canoe, preserving perfect balance in the frail bark, and rapidly scan the rough water.

"Think best to right. Inside big black rock," he might say. "What think?"

"Go ahead! You know best!" Loveland would shout back, to overcome the roar of rushing waters.

Then, through the swirl of the maddened flood, shooting in and out among boulders hidden or half-revealed in the midst of great spuming waves, they would dash on and on, seemingly on the verge of instant destruction. A moment later the canoe would leap into dead water again and they would be floating smoothly along while the alders, birches and dark firs appeared to pass by them like things endowed with life.

At all times the powerful stroke of the paddle astern was timed to the second, or else the tremendous drive of the iron-shod pole, in a fierce push, quickly averted impending disaster.

"I'll tell you, Mashkaugan, traveling with you is a liberal education," he once told the *voyageur*, after a breathless moment during which they had passed over a peculiarly dangerous place, shooting at the nick of time over a space in which, an instant before, an immense *tourniquet*, or whirlpool, had formed and subsided again.

But Mashkaugan, as usual, only grunted indifferently, having most probably failed to grasp the

sense of these words, and kept on paddling with great driving strokes he could keep up indefinitely, long after the younger man's arms were numbed and aching with the toil.

"This would be mighty tough going for a brigade," remarked Loveland at the boiling of a noontime cup of tea. "It looks to me as if we were on a fool's errand."

"Injuns come this way with pelts," replied Mashkaugan, shrugging his shoulders, "not so very bad."

"But they don't bring long canoes carrying a ton of stuff each," replied the young man, whereat the half-breed kept silent.

Finally, one day, shortly before the setting of the sun, they reached Mukumeshu Lake, a great sheet of water that was like a small inland sea. In the morning they found themselves unable to proceed, being held at the outlet by a strong wind that lifted dangerous waves; the storm-blasts alternated with pelting squalls of rain and hail. This was their first day of idleness, for they had not rested on Sundays. The half-breed had made no objection and Loveland, ever spurred by his

desire to return to Ameou as soon as possible, had traveled without ceasing. They spent the time under their small tent, making needed repairs to their clothing and shoepacks. Toward nightfall the rain ceased, and they carefully attended to a few small leaks that had developed in the bottom of the canoe, drying the bark with a torch of birch-bark, for the melted gum would not stick to moist surfaces.

It had proved to be a long day. In the morning they had awakened to hear the rain beating on the tent, and a peep outside revealed the turmoil of the waters. So they had turned over again, glad enough to sleep longer than usual. But presently hunger had aroused them. Loveland's thoughts went back to Tshemuak Post and the woman who waited for him. He no longer thought of the big world outside. Everything he held most dear was there, by the still, dead water.

The desolation of the immense sheet lying before him, whose further shores were invisible, the sodden moisture of everything, the growing chilliness of his damp body, conspired to irk Love-

land's mind until he became conscious of a sense of distress. The flies gathered in hordes under the tent, where they made a smoke and sat with eyes watering, coughing from the pungent reek.

From time to time, as Loveland looked at his companion, he found that Mashkaugan's gaze was fixed upon him, strangely; but when their eyes chanced to meet the half-breed would look away quickly and, apparently unconcerned, the man would scan the raging waters of the great lake through the opening in the tent.

But on the next day they found the sun shining brightly once more, and great fluffy clouds journeyed lazily over the sky while the waters rippled pleasantly on the gravelly edge of the shore.

They hurried over their breakfast and swiftly loaded the canoe, after which they paddled along the strand, to the northward, skirting rocky edges and following deep bays, stopping but a few moments at noon. A short time before the setting of the sun they saw a film of smoke rising among some spruces ahead of them, and presently discerned the dingy whiteness of tents, towards which they steered, arriving at an encampment of

Indians, with whom they remained all night.

In the evening, after eating heartily of fish caught on a handline trolled behind the canoe, and with pipes alight, they sat in front of the cheerful fires before the tents, and Loveland questioned the men carefully.

A strong, tall youth expressed surprise when Loveland announced his intention of exploring the rivers.

"*Matshi*," he said. "It is bad; there is nothing to hunt."

But the older men merely nodded, saying nothing. It was no concern of theirs. White men were apt to be very foolish, at times. Some of them were always searching for useless rocks and other things that could interest no sensible people. They brought tea, and tobacco, and gave provisions for the pelts of animals, which perhaps they worshipped after they got home, as their own forefathers stuffed a skin of bear with dried reeds and painted the head and paws with red, adorning them also with quills and beads. It was true that the fur was good to wear in cold weather, but unless the white men held the pelts in some sort of

honor, why should they give a great deal for a black fox and little for a red one, which was much prettier and just as warm? The white men were indeed strange beings, and their folly was not to be understood.

Loveland, weary with a long day's paddling, sought his tents and blankets early, but Mashkaugan remained up later with the Indians, who were only too glad of a long talk with one who had come from afar, and could give them news from the post. They sought to find out something as to what lay in the back of the white man's mind, for they had little belief in his explanations, but Mashkaugan did not enlighten them.

"What do I care as to why he is traveling in this country? It is all the same to me," he answered, negligently, in reply to some questions. "I am paid for the time that I work for him and we have plenty of food with us. Also there is much fish and the partridges are plenty."

"We do not like those other two rivers," said a very old man, shaking his head. "I mind that in former days our Manitou Ilnos, our medicine-men, often told of evil things upon their waters."

Mashkaugan lifted up his head, quickly. This information appeared to startle him.

"There can be nothing worse than the White Rapids," he said. "It is to be feared, surely."

"Yes, but that is also a place that is accursed," answered the old man, who rose and went off to his tent.

"He says that because his only son, a fine big lad, met his death in them," Mashkaugan was informed by a youth. "Any man falling in the deep hole of the falls would never be seen again. His bones would lie there to the end of time."

"It is sure that this man Uapishiu, the Yellow Hair, knows little of this country," put in another Indian, "but the man Curran, he of the thin face and the sharp eyes, knows all about it. When we have come to Tshemuak to sell fur he has talked to us about it, and we told him what we knew. Yes, we told him that the river to the north is well hunted, being a good country, with mink in plenty and fine otter. He knew that it was so, for all the fur goes to him. Also he was told that the river to the east, and the one beyond that, come from barren lands where there is little

fur, and the caribou pass in small numbers. No men can live there—nor anything but windegos and—and the spirits of evil things."

"It is an order from the Company," said Mashkaugan, uneasily.

This, of course, was enough. For generations they knew that the Company was something, or somebody, against whose will no men could prevail. It was some tremendous force that sent big canoes loaded with goods, which took away peltries on the return journeys. It was something mightier than the agents themselves and therefore kin to the Manitou. Did it not appear to be the master of all lands and men—even of the beasts and fowls and fishes all the world over?

But when the old man who had lost his son had entered his tent he discussed the matter with his wife, for he was uneasy in his mind.

"The great Company sends men to travel and look over the lands; but it never sends them unless some one has said to them that a country is well worth looking over. Whoever they be, they search only for the places where there is much fur, and men to get it. Who but the man Curran can

have told? No other white men have been here. He heard our tales and went away again. For some purpose of his own he has lied. He is an evil man, we know, of hot temper and strange ways. The death of our son is upon him. May the chief of all evil beings torment his spirit!"

"This youth Uapishiu of the Yellow Hair is a good man," said the wife. "Perhaps Curran did not want him at the post, being afraid of him when he sells *ishkuteuapui*—the water that burns. It was this that caused the death of our strong son, last year, who, shouting loudly and upstanding, drove his canoe in the middle of the White Rapids, wherefore we saw him no more."

These two old people shook their heads many times, for the soreness of their great loss was always in their hearts, and they had never ceased to mourn. But presently the whole camp was asleep, but for a few lean dogs that prowled about the embers of campfires, searching for neglected morsels of food.

On the next morning the travelers said good-by and started again, meeting with two more families in the course of the next few days. After speak-

ing at length with them Loveland became more and more dissatisfied with the information he was gathering.

"I am becoming very sure that we are wasting our time," he told Mashkaugan, "but now that we have come so far we must go and look for ourselves. One can never be certain that these fellows are giving one straight talk. Yet I don't see how there can be any Indians living up the rivers to the east, or these people would surely know about them. Of course they are always scared at the mention of tribes they are not acquainted with; but they do not even give me some cock-and-bull story about bad people living in that direction."

He was thinking of the dreadful stories northern Indians tell about the fierce and ferocious Esquimaux, who, in turn, blanch with fear at the mention of the blood-thirsty Indians to the south of them. Mashkaugan put on an air of indifference. It was all the same to him; he would go on or return, just as he was bidden to. When the half-breed sought his blanket, that night, he thought over his last words with Curran.

"Do not let anything happen too soon," the

latter had recommended. "Travel a long way and meet as many Indians as you can. Let them see that you take good care of Loveland. Let them be able to say that you worked hard for him, that you took the biggest loads, that you two were friendly and got along well. For the talk of men spreads very far."

Five days were sufficient to enable them to look over the north branch. It proved to be fine ground and very easily traveled, with much dead water and few falls. But it was all well trapped over, until it ended in tiny streams oozing out of great marshlands, beyond which there was no traveling.

Then they went towards the first eastern river, which took them only four days to explore. It soon proved to be utterly impossible for canoe navigation, and Loveland had to turn back.

The remaining stream, flowing into the lake not more than a mile away from the inlet of the previous one, at first promised fair journeying; but nowhere on its banks could they discover any trace of Indians, excepting in one place, where a high rocky island held evident remnants of ancient

buryings. Loveland wanted to land there but Mashkaugan urged him away from it, crossing himself and paddling his hardest.

"There has been no living man on it for a hundred years," he declared, "and it is an evil place where—where things may happen."

They kept on and after a few days came to a long cañon walled in by cliffs of no very great height, wherein the waters narrowed into a seething torrent, which made the use of canoes impossible. They made a long portage, finding no evidence of the previous presence of men, but it only brought them again to a barren land where trees were dwarfed and twisted by strong winds and there were great tracts of grey moss, edged by rank sour grasses, extending beyond a man's vision. Scarcely could they find an old game-trail, showing that it was not on the line of the caribou migration. For two days more they progressed, pushing through reeds and along sloughs where ducks and geese rose in swarms. Loveland killed a few with his rifle, for food. Soon, however, the men were compelled to acknowledge that the outlook was utterly hopeless. Mashkaugan had already

urged him to return. There was something in the unending vastness of the country, in the dull, sad dreariness of it all, that seemed to make him uneasy and eager to leave. His imagination doubtless peopled the endless marshes with visions that appalled him.

"Well," said Lawrence, as they decided to go back, "it's been a wild goose chase, and no mistake. Still, I'm not sorry to have seen all this country. What an immensity!"

As they retraced their steps the going was much easier. They were traveling with the current now, and the provisions had greatly diminished, so that the canoe rode lightly on the water and the portages could be negotiated more rapidly. They again took what seemed like desperate chances in boiling rapids, but always went through them safely, and finally they stood again on the shore of Mukumeshu.

CHAPTER VI

THE FALLING OF THE BLOW

The big lake had to be crossed again, a long and tedious journey since such frail craft as theirs cannot be trusted far from shore, owing to the ever-present danger of sudden storms. Also they were obliged to halt a whole day while a violent gale blew itself out. Always they had to follow the shore, in a great circle half around the lake, only cutting across from point to point when the water was calm enough.

Finally, after stopping a few times to pass the time of day with encamped Indians, they arrived at the outlet of the big lake. Loveland felt more contented now than at any time since he had left. They would always travel swiftly with the current, now, and it would speed him back to the cherished woman he had learned to love so dearly. As they started down the river the flood bore them so swiftly that in three hours they had conquered

a distance that had taken a long day of fierce toil on the upward trip.

Loveland, for some time, had been conscious that Mashkaugan was always watching him in a strange way. Over rapids and in dangerous places the half-breed actually seemed to hesitate at times, as if he had lost some of his wonderful nerve.

One day, in camp, the hunchback had taken up Loveland's gun, ostensibly to clean it with a greasy rag, but when the young man chanced to look at him he became possessed by an uncomfortable feeling that the man was staring at him strangely and that some queer notion was passing through his mind. But Mashkaugan put the gun aside, quietly, and busied himself in the making of batter for flap-jacks. This impression of Loveland's lasted but a moment. As a matter of fact, Mashkaugan had turned out much better than he had anticipated. Always willing, seeking at all times to take upon himself the heaviest loads and the greater part of the work around camp, it was difficult to see how any man could have proved a better or more efficient helper than the half-breed.

Surly he was, and taciturn, but that was a part of his nature and a characteristic of many of the men who live in the wilds. On the whole Loveland felt that Curran's choice of a companion for him had been a wise one.

In fast time they reached the great White Rapids again, and shot the upper part of them at tremendous speed, stopping in a bit of dead water above the place where the narrowing river seemed to take a breathing spell before it should enter the chasm, fiercely tear along its cliffs and finally take a leap of some forty feet into the turmoil below. With powerful strokes they reached the shore, landing upon a great flat rock and unloading the canoe, which they pulled out of the water and turned bottom up. Mashkaugan found a tiny leak and built a small fire to heat some gum. Finally the hole was covered and the half-breed smoothed the coating down, with his wetted thumb, after which he lit his pipe. His hands, strangely enough, seemed very unsteady as he took up a lighted ember. Loveland was busy making up his pack, which consisted of his own war-bag, with a partly filled fifty-pound bag of flour.

"Leave that behind," grunted Mashkaugan. "I come back for it."

But Loveland had already swung the load to his forehead.

"It's no trouble to take that across," he said. "I can't let you do all the work, Mashkaugan. The going isn't so very bad and you have plenty to carry."

He looked about him, carefully, to see that nothing was being left behind, and noted that a little flour had been spilled on the rock. This wouldn't do. He put his pack down to investigate and pulled out the cotton bag, finding a small hole in it. From his own pack he took a spare bag of waterproof canvas and transferred the flour to it, carefully tying up the neck with a bit of strong cord.

"Better leave that flour," Mashkaugan said again.

The half-breed, while always willing to do more than his share of all work without the slightest complaint, had never before objected to Loveland's packing all he wanted to carry. This insistence seemed strange to the young man but he

thought little of it. The hunchback was a strange chap, anyway.

Without paying any further attention to him Loveland started off, closely followed by Mashkaugan, who was balancing the canoe on his sturdy shoulders. They had to go slowly and carefully to clamber up the rather narrow ridge which could give secure footing only to a steady man. Below them, upon their right hand, the clear brownish water was swirling into the chasm, rising in angry waves that seemed to explode in the air as if some stupendous magic force were blasting them asunder, converting them into clouds of spray. The thunderous roar was drowning out all other sounds.

At length they came to a place where the path was exceedingly narrow owing to the fact that the cliff jutted vertically at their left. Here a long step had to be taken across a cleft that had split the huge rocky mass, cleanly, as if with some gigantic blade.

The hunchback, with glaring eyes and heart beating in his throat, was watching his chance.

He was very close behind Loveland, who was stepping with the greatest caution yet without the slightest idea of danger. He was inured to such work, by this time.

For a second before taking the long stride Loveland stopped to assure himself of his balance. On the rock his left foot held firmly. He was perfectly safe, and moved forward.

At this moment, just as he began the long step, the point of the canoe that was borne on the great shoulders of the half-breed slipped between the ledge at the left and himself, bore on the side of his body, and before the irresistible pressure he swayed to one side, staggered, and clutched at the air, helplessly. With a cry that was unheard in the turmoil he pitched down thirty feet in the caldron beneath.

Mashkaugan stepped back quickly and laid the canoe down on the rocky shelf, swiftly, after which he threw himself down on his stomach, his head pushed forward above the raging waters. For an instant, far below, in the sudding foam, he caught sight of a ghastly, distorted face, of limbs

struggling in the flood; then there was another swift vision of a limp body helplessly rolling down between rocky spurs.

A second later there remained not the slightest trace of any man; the—the thing had been engulfed, swallowed up, perhaps ground to shreds; yet Mashkaugan searched the foot of the cliffs with eager, staring eyes and peered through the foam at the bottom of the falls, over the froth-specked black waters of the pool, along the rugged sides that were deeply worn by uncounted ages of whirling flood and ice crashing and grinding away at the stone.

He could not discover the slightest sign of Loveland. The Indians of Mukumeshu knew what they were talking about!

Mashkaugan then sat down and with trembling hands tried to cut tobacco for his pipe. But he put it in his pocket again; scarcely could he hold the knife. He suddenly felt very cold, but the brow over which he passed his sleeve was streaming with sweat, in spite of which he began to shiver like a man suffering from some malignant ague. He could not remain in this place, for sud-

denly, out of the thundering of crashing waters, it seemed to him that there were bursting forth angry voices that called him a murderer and were swearing vengeance everlasting upon him!

In a frenzy of haste he carried the canoe to the end of the portage. Then, dreading the sight of the raging waters he took a long detour over the cliffs, for the remainder of his load, and returned with it by the same way, clambering hurriedly, agile as some great cat pursued, over some awful going. Yet when, at last, he came to a place where the ground was level and the walking easy, he began to stagger like a drunken man. On reaching the water again it was all he could do to lift the light canoe down into the stream. The pack and provisions he threw in, any way, in desperate haste. Then he got in, crouching down into the stern, and the swift current bore him away, very fast, rocky cliffs and gnarled trunks slipping by him, confused in form, assuming strange shapes; yet, rapidly though the river bore him, his long sinewy arms plied the paddle as fiercely as if some gruesome thing, hungering for his life, was in pursuit of him.

As he went on he scanned the surface of the water. Small rocky heads appearing at the surface gave him awful starts; a fleck of brownish white foam, for an instant, seemed to reveal an awful, upturned white face that reproached him and would continue to hover above his canoe while he journeyed. Until long after sundown he drove the canoe with utter recklessness in the middle of boiling, seething waters, yet always he emerged safely; but after he reached the long, dead water there was no more excitement. The wind had fallen; the stillness of the great forest slowly penetrated his soul with a new terror. He sought to keep out of the black shadows cast upon the glassy surface.

It was so late, and so deep the darkness when he stopped, that he was unable to pick out a fair camping place, and was compelled to light his fire on poor ground full of roots and stones, where he boiled his kettle and made tea; the drink was grateful but when he tried to eat the morsels seemed to cleave to the roof of his mouth. He could swallow nothing but the scalding, bitter tea.

He did not even try to put up the tent, merely

rolling himself up in his blankets, but sleep refused to come and he stared into the darkness, startled by the passing of rodents through the bushes, his breath stopping at the ululations of a big horned owl, at the croaking of some wading water-fowl.

Hitherto his evil deeds had been limited to various pilferings and the breaking of laws which, in common with many men of the wilderness, he considered unjust. It is hard for some to understand that game must disappear unless protected; that the illicit making of strong drink or its sale to Indians is fraught with awful consequences. But now he had become a murderer, a man against whom every man's hand would be raised and whom the ghostly agencies he dreaded would seek out for punishment. The promises and threats of Curran, his fancied wrongs at the hands of Loveland, had made him a ready enough tool in the hands of the chief agent. No sense of pity for the victim entered his soul, at this time. There was nothing but the agonizing fear of consequences, the awful possibility of punishment from forces ever lurking in somber places, in the dark-

ness of the night, among the tangles of forest or the whirlpools and hidden rocks of rivers.

The consciousness he finally lost, in the small hours of the morning, was replaced by visions in which he saw the foul fiends of Indian lore and the great evil spirit of the priests leagued against him in an appalling array of grinning, monstrous faces. When he awoke, chilled to the marrow, his bones sore from contact with hard rough ground, he gasped with relief to find himself free from the ghostly crew that had obsessed his dreams, and rose, shivering.

CHAPTER VII

TWO ARRIVALS

For a good many weeks nothing of importance occurred at Tshemuak Post. The Indians who were summering there idled away a good part of the time; winter is the only season that gives them occupation. Some new canoes were built, in leisurely fashion, out of great rolls of bark they had brought from afar. The women, of course, were kept busy with the making and mending of garments and footwear. Some of the tents needed a new length of cloth, and there was some work in the way of making new nets, or repairing older ones, in which the great pike, pouncing on whitefish caught in the meshes, had made big rents. Indeed the whitefish would soon be running towards their spawning ground. Other women, having completed the most necessary work, sewed beads and quills on shoepacks or shirts, or wove baskets out of sweetgrass. The

men, however, mostly contented themselves with smoking their pipes, stretched flat on the ground or sitting by their fires, discussing matters a thousand times threshed over. Children played with blunt arrows, wandering off in the thickets for a chance shot at partridge or hare, which they seldom killed.

July, which the Indians know as the Moon of Moulting, had ended and passed into the Moon when caribou-horns shed their velvet. During its later days Ameou began to look eagerly to the return of her man, Uapishiu of the Yellow Hair. She was constantly leaving the tent to go down to the bank of the river, where she would sit down and watch the reaches to the north, whence he would come hastening towards her, with open arms and his face lighted by the joy in his heart.

Her hands were never idle, however, for she constantly toiled over tiny shirts of the finest buckskin, which she lovingly broidered with beads of many colors, and little caps, or tiny moccasins so small that they might have been fashioned to fit a man's thumb.

At dusk, when the shadows darkened the river

and one could no longer see very far, she would return to the dwelling of the old chief, her father, and lie down to a sleep that was usually restless, for at times uneasy dreams came to her and she would awaken with a start.

At last, of an evening, all the old women in the camp gathered in the tent and stood about her, crooning words such as may propitiate the spirits of evil and arouse the good to endeavor. To their astonishment the light of happiness came to her face.

"Indeed, now I am glad," she told the wife of Nimissuts. "It is well that my man Uapishiu has not yet returned, for he will be spared any sorrowing over my pain. On the day of his coming back there will be nothing but happiness for him. It is a good thing that the time has come."

The old women chanted again in low voices, since there were no priests about to reprove them for heathen practices, while the young woman awaited, strong in body and stronger still in faith and hope.

Early on the next morning the chief agent left the Post, after grumbling about the food the old

woman Anne had cooked for him, which, he declared, was tough and burnt, quite unfit for a man's eating.

"When that girl Ameou becomes my wife I'll get some decent grub, once in a while!" he told himself. "Hello, I wonder what the old buck's up to?"

Chief Nimissuts was walking about the tents, looking mighty important and clad in his best raiment, in which he strutted about, proudly, like a man who has accomplished some praiseworthy deed.

"Hello! Old man! What feast day art thou celebrating?" asked the agent, mockingly.

The old chief pulled the stem of his long pipe from his mouth, slowly, and looked at him.

"A feast day! It is well said," he answered. "I have put on my best shirt because this is the day of the feast of the birth of a son to Loveland Yellow Hair, my daughter's husband. Indeed, it is a son, strong and lusty, according to the old women who know. The down upon his head is of a yellow color. He is now quietly asleep, as is his mother, who now rests quietly after the coming

of her son. The little one has been shown to me. There is no doubt that he will be sturdy in limb, and his cry is loud. I am minded that he will in time grow to be as I was during the days of my youth. Have I ever told thee that once I bore two bags of flour and a three-fathom canoe over Long Portage without a rest and returned for another load, without stopping?"

"Thou hast told it many times, Nimissuts, but art thou not afraid to boast too much?" asked Curran, wickedly. "I have heard that evil spirits may overhear such words and play pranks upon thee and the child. Better have a care!"

The old chief looked at him uneasily, for he believed in such things and his face fell.

"Indeed, I was making no boast as to the little one," he answered. "I repeated only that which the old women said, and spoke of things I was once able to do and never will be able to do again. A man may surely be glad to have seen the son of his daughter, who will now be a very strong bond between her and Yellow Hair. From such words can surely come no harm."

Nevertheless the old man returned to his tent,

stepping in very silently, and donned his old clothes again. During the rest of the day he moved about in a manner that was quite subdued, and spent all his time sitting on the log in front of his dwelling, cogitating over bad luck and good.

But Curran had returned to the main building and was deep in thought, biting at the horn stem of his empty pipe as if his strong jaws had been eager to destroy something. The old woman Anne, speaking to her husband, whispered that the agent was very angry, and denied that the flapjacks were burnt in the morning.

"The will is in my own hands," Curran commented to himself; "but if—if anything has happened to Loveland, this little whelp is now the heir, will or no will! I suppose that a court would appoint guardians for him, and then I wouldn't even have the handling of the money, even if I married Ameou. That brat is badly in the way, it would be a good thing to get rid of it for then the way would be all clear!"

Curran took down his gun and went off through the woods, emerging finally upon the Long Bar-

rens, where, at this time of the year, one might chance to come across a caribou. The only outcome of this trip was that he managed to miss an easy shot at a young stag, and he returned weary, in a dark mood that was as restless as ever.

He had already thought constantly about that baby, as a complicating matter in his plans. One crime that he had worked out must surely have been carried out by this time. Another would have to follow, but he must be ever so careful, for the slightest false step might prove disastrous.

Before noon on the following morning, Father Gregoire, the missionary, strong and hardy in spite of many years, who intended to winter in the North that year, arrived after a hard, long journey.

"*Bonjour*," he told Curran. "How are you all at Tshemuak? Any couples to be married, or babies to be christened? By the way, I bring with me a letter for you, and a couple for the young man Loveland. Away, is he? He will be glad to get them when he returns. A child born to him? I will baptize it at once, for I can stay

but a few hours, being late on my trip. I used up a week with a man that was dying at Shetimayo Lake. At least I thought so, but by the blessing of God he recovered. I will go to my pack and get the letters. Ted Fisk at Big Rat was glad to be able to send them by me. He is well and sends best wishes."

Curran only obtained the letters after the old priest had conducted a long search through his pack, finding them in the bootleg of a *botte sauvage*, where he had placed them for greater safety. In the meanwhile the agent had stood by him, so anxious that he dug his fingernails in the palms of his hands. The venerable priest finally left him, going to the tent of Nimissuts, greatly pleased at the prospect of enlarging his fold, and was received with much welcome. To the old women his coming seemed of good omen.

But Curran rushed into the post building and shut himself up in his room, where he tore open his letter, which bore the name of a firm of lawyers in Quebec. His fingers were shaking with excitement as he unfolded it, and as he read his eyes glistened with a sordid light:

Dear Sir:

Pursuant to your instructions we have caused a search to be made of the will of the late Sir John Conway Loveland, in London, of which a true copy is herewith enclosed. You will see that by its terms a number of charitable bequests are made, the balance of the estate being left to his nephew—one Lawrence Alston Loveland. This balance is estimated by our correspondent at a value of seventy thousand pounds sterling.

Awaiting your further commands,

Very sincerely yours,

O'Meagher, MacDonald & Quincy.

"That just makes three hundred and fifty thousand dollars!" Curran muttered between his teeth. "If it were not for that infernal little brat it wouldn't take a year before I had it all, easy as falling off a log. That whelp is in my way and'll have to be attended to. Why doesn't that fellow Mashkaugan get back? It's about time for him to arrive. I've got him under my thumb and he will have to do as I say."

He sat down, looking intently at the floor, as dreams of wealth and ease passed before his eyes.

"I can afford to promise that hunchback anything he wants. Of course I won't tell him how

much is at stake. Five thousand dollars—yes, even maybe ten thousand—that wouldn't make any difference after I got that fortune. I'll be able to spare it all right!"

He left his room again, after locking up the letter, carefully. The blackness of his thoughts so filled his evil mind that he had no realization of the early autumnal breeze that was beginning to shake golden leaves from trembling aspens and silvery birches. For him there was no beauty in the glimmering river or the distant, purpling hills, nothing that could please in the forest, no interest in life but the grasping of money, ever so much money. He looked at old Father Gregoire, walking upright and strongly, like a young man, who had just come out of the chief's tent after the baptism of Ameou's man-child. He was being followed by some of the old women who had respectfully witnessed his mysterious ceremony, which they called his medicine, and was to avert all ills and cause the child to grow in full strength, they had no doubt.

The missionary hurried to his canoe, where his two men were waiting for him. He told them

that he intended to go for a short trip up one of the affluent rivers, from which, he informed them, he would return in a few days, or perhaps some weeks, in time for his journey north, where he expected to spend the whole winter in one of the big posts on the Bay.

After the old priest's departure Curran went over to the tent, where the wife of Nimissuts was bustling about, exceedingly busy with many things, as women are all over the world in a house where a child is born.

"All but myself have been given a look at the son of Yellow Hair," he said. "May I also go in?"

The woman proudly admitted him. He was the chief, the man who represented that great mysterious and all-powerful company, and it was an honor that he conferred. The man did his best to look as pleasant as possible; it was becoming more and more urgent for him to ingratiate himself to the utmost with every one in the family of Nimissuts.

"I hope you are very well," he told Ameou, who was lying beneath some blankets, on the

ground, upon a thick layer of balsam boughs. The infant's little head was resting upon the hollow of her arm, and as she looked at him he was struck by her wonderful beauty.

"I need not ask," he resumed. "You are looking splendidly. It is a wonderful *ouash;* a very beautiful little child—one that will surely grow into a mighty man and a fine hunter.

"You must take the best care of him, always, and see that he does not come to any harm. If there is anything in the store that you want you must tell me and I will get it for you at once. Indeed you must not lack for anything. In me you will always find a true friend, a man who wishes you well."

The young mother looked at him, somewhat puzzled. Instinctively she disliked him, as did many of the Indians. Never had she felt that she could put any trust in him; Loveland himself, she knew, had never been able to consider him as a real friend, as a man to stick to through thick and thin. Yet his pleasant words were agreeable and his praise of the child, a thing that goes

straight to the heart of every mother, mitigated her dislike of him.

Curran very soon went away and returned to the post, where he took the bottle he kept concealed beneath his bunk and took a swallow of the fiery stuff. By no means was he drinking to any excess, knowing how necessary it was that he should keep his mind clear at all times, but now and then a certain nervousness took hold of him, which a small drink seemed to dispel.

Several days then went by, during which the mother gained back her strength, rapidly. The winds blowing down the valley, traveling from the big hills to the north and westward, also gathered greater force so that the leaves began to swirl more plentifully over the river, speckling it with the gold of the birch and the crimsons and scarlets of maple and ash. Small birds began to gather in circling clouds that suddenly came down into high trees, as thickly as clustered grapes, and rose again, preparing to wend their way towards the warmer lands of the South.

By this time Ameou could again leave the tent,

with her little one in her arms, and sat upon the river's bank, watching for the arrival that was to make her happiness complete. Fortunately the baby took much time, and brought her mind much ease, for every movement of its lips or eyes, every opening and shutting of tiny fingers was a most amazing thing, as utterly new as if this little one had been the first ever to visit the earth. All this filled her heart with a power to be patient, to await in confidence the return that must surely be very near. At times a fancy would come to her that the canoe must surely be just beyond the bend. In a few minutes it would be showing, pushing its nose out from the cover of the black rock at the point. Her heart would begin to beat fast, striking hard the bosom upon which the little head rested so softly, but a moment later she had realized it was but a waking dream, a notion born of her great desire, of her endless longing. Her eyes, at such times, swam with a salty moisture, and once a tear fell on the baby's cheek, but he slept on, knowing as yet nothing of happiness or misery. She was not always alone. Children

from the other tents would crowd about her, sometimes, to see the wonderful little *ouash* with a head of yellow down, like the golden fluff of tiny ducklings in the early summer. They stood beside her, quiet and well behaved, as is the wont of Indian children, but beady black eyes stared hard, in wonder, after which, perchance, they were lifted to the young woman's face and met her sweet smile. Women also came and sat with her, telling of long waiting for husbands, for lovers, for sons who had finally turned up, happily, and sat again by the fires, after long absences that had made hearts ache. The men spoke to her also. They knew the country. Some of them had been to the Mukumeshu district and others had heard of it. It had been so described to them that, with the Indians' wonderful memory for places, they could speak of every league of its great discharging river, of every great point and bay of the big lake. They told her how great a trip it was, repeated that men might be windbound for ever so many days on the big water, and told her that, in exploring new country to the east, the two men

might easily have been delayed. She must not be surprised if a week more, or even two, should elapse before their return.

The girl would nod, rather sadly, and look down the river again.

CHAPTER VIII

MASHKAUGAN RETURNS

On the very next day, late in the afternoon, Ameou was sitting on the bank again with her little one at her breast. The sun was beginning to go down in a riot of wondrous color, but it was still very light. Her eyes were longingly turned to that distant point at the end of the curve in the river.

A thousand times already she had felt certain that something was appearing, something that had only proved a deception due to eyes overstrained, on most occasions, although once it was the mere beating of the wings of a great blue heron, flying low, or perhaps nothing but a dead branch, broken off by the wind and floating down.

Once again her eyes caught something, and she thought herself the prey of the old illusions, but an instant later she leaped to her feet, excitedly, and waved her arm. With a wildly beating heart she called to the others. Some of the Indians came

running towards her, knowing that it could hardly be any other than the returning canoe, since none of the families that had already left the post for their far hunting-grounds would return before the breaking of the ice in the next spring-time.

"Yes, there is no doubt. It is surely a canoe coming," said Ouasouanipi, the Fish Spear, a young man whose vision was renowned among a sharp-eyed people. "Presently we shall hear the firing of a gun. Let us run to the tents and get ours that we may receive them according to custom with large measures of *pok* in the barrels."

So the men dashed off for their guns to celebrate the arrival of the explorers, and returned, pouring in the powder from ancient horns and priming the nipples, for only a few of them had modern weapons.

Ouasouanipi then grasped a man who stood by him, by the shoulder, and spoke in a low voice: "I surely can see but one man in the canoe, sitting at the stern."

But Ameou had overheard him and anxiously strained her vision. In a very few seconds she was also certain in spite of her hopes and an

ashen color came into her face as she stared with watering eyes and pressed her baby to her breast, convulsively, whereat the little one began to cry, for it was not as silent as Indian babies and often bellowed lustily after the manner of white infants.

"It may be that one of the two has become ill or is hurt and lying down at the bottom of the canoe," said old Nimissuts, hopefully, "and it may be that it is Uaspishiu of the Yellow Hair who is paddling. It is too far to make sure."

"No! It is that man Mashkaugan of the Crooked Back!" asserted Ouasouanipi. "His face I cannot see, but the paddle is glinting in the light; I know the motions of his arms and the way of the man's paddling. Moreover the head lies deep between the shoulders. It can be none other."

Curran, from the post building, had seen the assembling of the people and hastened down to where they were gathered. He listened to what they were saying, going from one to the other and walking up and down like some wild beast in a cage, restlessly. His nerves were on edge from too much smoking of strong tobacco and, perhaps, from the bottle under his bunk.

Less than a minute later all could plainly see Mashkaugan's face. He was paddling powerfully against the current and yet, to all the expert Indians, his work looked like the final desperate effort of a badly spent man.

He was coming nearer and nearer—until all could see that in the bottom of the canoe, which rode high out of water, there was nothing but a pack.

The wife of old Nimissuts was just in time to seize the baby. Ameou had suddenly swayed and fallen unconscious, with never a word or cry.

By this time the voyageur ceased to paddle, merely guiding the canoe towards the strand, and Curran cried out to him, in Judas-like anger, so that all might hear:

"What hast thou done with Loveland, the man who went with thee and whom I gave in thy charge? What has become of him?"

"He slipped and fell in the great White Rapids. He would carry a load greater than I was willing he should take. From the narrow path on the cliff he went down," replied Mashkaugan. "The waters closed over him and I

never saw him again, though I made long search. He had all the flour on his back, and it went with him. I have had little to eat and am starving."

Indeed his appearance bore out this statement, for the man was gaunt and red-eyed, and his sharp face was wolfish with the marks of great hunger as he staggered painfully up the bank, leaning on his paddle, so that men took him by the arms to help him up the steep path.

Curran went to him, putting his hand on the man's shoulder.

"It is a terrible misfortune," he said, hoarsely. "Come with me to the post. Food will be given thee at once, and I must hear all about this dreadful happening. I had rather have lost my own life. I—I cannot believe that my friend is gone!"

"I will tell all about it after I have eaten," answered the hunchback, sullenly. "Get me hot tea and fat meat and bread first."

Ameou was beginning to return to her senses as the two men went away to the log building. With the help of women she managed to stagger to her feet. She cried out for her baby, insisting

that it should be given to her, and seized it with a sort of desperation, as if some one had been seeking to take it away from her.

The women, weeping, accompanied her to her tent and laid her down upon the blankets covering a thick, springy bed of balsam boughs, after which they squatted beside her, tearfully, understanding her awful grief.

At the post Mashkaugan collapsed upon one of the rough chairs, putting his elbows on the table and letting his head fall upon them. He was still breathing fast, his ill-formed chest panting, and Curran stood beside him, anxiously, waiting in silence. The old woman Anne hastened to place dishes and tin cups on the table; in the next room fat meat was sizzling on the stove, but the half-breed did not move until she placed some bread beside him, which he seized and began to devour, greedily. When the tea came, black and bitter with strength, he drank it scalding and threw himself upon the food the woman put before him.

"Hang it, man, don't eat so fast," Curran told him. "You'll make yourself ill if you wolf down all that grub."

But Mashkaugan turned on him, snarling.

"You didn't do the starving, did you? I wish you had, and—and done the rest of your accursed work!"

"Hush," whispered Curran, frightened and looking over his shoulders. "These confounded old Indians will hear you."

He went to the door, swiftly, to see if they had been near, but through the open door he saw the length of the big room and the cooking stove near the end, where the old couple stood, doubtless discussing the dreadful news. The old woman Anne was holding up the corner of a dirty apron to her eyes, wiping the tears away from her wrinkled cheeks, for Loveland had always been good and kind to these people, never swearing and scolding at them as Curran was wont to do.

It did not take Mashkaugan a very long time to finish his meal, for he had bolted the food down in great pieces, like a dog afraid that others may rob him. Finally he pushed his chair away from the table and pulled out his pipe. Curran handed him a plug and the hunchback nervously shaved off some tobacco and stuffed it in the bowl.

"Hang it! Don't stand over me like that," he ordered roughly, as if he had been the master of the post. "Go and get me a drink, and hurry with it!" Curran obeyed quickly, going for the stuff to his room and returning with it.

"That's better," said Mashkaugan, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. "I—I'll be all right now."

A few minutes later Curran dragged him off into the stillness of the woods back of the post, as if they could not have trusted the walls of the dwelling with the things that were to be told. Even in the thick forest Curran spoke low and looked at him suspiciously, as if the trunks of hemlock and spruces might have been eavesdroppers.

They sat down upon a dead tree, and the hunchback, in brief choppy sentences, related all that had happened.

"And of course you're absolutely sure that he—that he is dead?" asked Curran. "You—you didn't see the body, afterwards?"

"No, one doesn't see the bodies of men who go down in the White Rapids. Ask the Indians, you

fool! Of course I looked for it, for a short while. I wasn't going to hang around there any longer'n I could help. Them Rapids don't never give up anything, you bet. What was ever seen of young Mishtanipi who went over them, mad with the drink he bought from you? And yet his old people stuck around there for days, lookin' for it. They was tellin' me so over there at Mukumeshu. You make me tired!"

He wiped away again the sweat that was coming down his brow, and swore at the flies that stung hard, unhindered as yet by the chill wind that was blowing down from the north.

Curran made no answer, knowing the reputation of the White Rapids among the Indians. Indeed, even if a man escaped from them with his life, what prospect was there that he could ever make his way back without a canoe, especially in the case of a man whose previous life had not inured him to terrible hardship? No Indian would have undertaken such a trip for love or money. Mashkaugan had clearly seen him rolling in the boiling waters, and then the body had been swallowed up. This was surely enough. It had been cleverly

done. Even if Loveland had not been lost he might have considered the happening as an accident due to a misstep on the part of the hunchback. Moreover, it was the most likely place in the world for such an occurrence. Whatever might happen and whatever the suspicions, nothing could ever be proved against the two plotters.

Curran was anxious to speak to Mashkaugan about Loveland's child, and was on the point of mentioning it when he thought better of it. The matter might as well wait for a short time, for there was no great hurry.

The half-breed, whether owing to his past hunger or his sufferings, or for some other unknown reason that had affected his surly mind, now spoke impatiently in a curt fashion, and had actually looked at him once or twice like some maddened dog ready to leap at his master's throat, yet perhaps still too cowed to try. He had gone so far as to swear at him, angrily, as if he no longer recognized the agent's authority and power.

All this was sufficient reason for Curran to keep his mouth shut for a time. He thought it most

likely that a few days of decent feeding and of complete rest would restore the man to a more normal condition, after which he would readily enough enter into any further evil scheme that might be proposed to him.

Slowly they made their way back to the post where the Indians impatiently awaited Mashkaugan's return. They were all eager to obtain from him all the details of the tragedy.

Their hard and precarious lives held few matters of great interest save starvings, and the upsetting of canoes in angry water. Accidents of all kinds, together with the news of hunting, the prospects of abundance of fur and rabbits, and the price of pelts, were the only things that greatly concerned them, as always happens where a few men live in seclusion from the big world. They very naturally displayed anxiety to know in what manner the wilderness had once more exacted its toll.

As soon as the agent had left Mashkaugan alone they crowded around him, but to their importunities he replied impatiently.

"You are men and hunters," he said angrily,

"and travelers of the woods and rivers. Why bother me? You know how it is. A white man not very long among you, bearing a heavy pack, is walking on a shelf of rock above waters wherein evil spirits live—and he slips, or misses his step. It is easy. And then the load upon his shoulders overbalances him—and that is the end, of course. Then what can the other man do? Go away, I am weary with your talking. Let those of you who have been to the White Rapids tell the others what manner of place it is, that they may understand, and let me alone!"

The men who had gathered about him nodded. It was all very easy to understand. Of course they were disappointed, as they would have liked to hear, over and over again, with ever so many details, all about this awful happening, which they would continue to talk about for months and years. But also they knew that a man who has been hungry for some days and returns alone, with his head filled with the thoughts of the death that has come to his companion, swiftly as the clapping of thunder coming with blinding flash to rive asunder a great pine, may for some time be short

of temper and little inclined to talk. Moreover, they knew Mashkaugan for a crabbed and sullen fellow who seldom joined in the talks about the campfires, wherefore they withdrew and left him alone.

After the man had gone off to the rough shack which belonged to him, and which he preferred to the log building where he might have lived, the others sat in a circle or squatted about a fire of heavy logs, long into the night, and spoke in low, hushed voices of similar happenings, being under the spell of fear lest the hunger of the spirits of evil might not yet be satiated, so that one of themselves might be destined soon to fall into their maws.

Then, all subdued and sorrowful, they sought their blankets. When Loveland had been with them everything went well. He was a good man, looking at one fair in the face, whom they had always found just and straight of talk, whereas Curran, who would now lord it over them alone, was a man of different breed. Their sorrow was genuine, and in this taking away they considered that the spirits had been passing harsh to them.

CHAPTER IX

OUT OF THE JAWS

Loveland may have been the one-thousandth man who could have escaped while the other nine hundred and ninety-nine would have found a certain death in the turmoil of frenzied waters crashing among merciless jagged spurs of rock and smooth-worn boulders.

Whether it was by the hazard of blind fortune or some providential interference he emerged from the jaws of death, just as, in the tempest of a desperate battle, a man may come through unscathed in the hail of hurtling shot and the thunderous bursting of great shell, unhindered by barriers of steel before which all others fall, and find himself, dazed and inarticulate, among the living.

The flood had seized upon Loveland and tossed him about, rolling him with the stupendous force which no strength of a giant could have re-

sisted. He may have made a few futile efforts to save himself, and who knows that they did not serve a purpose? But it had been a matter of fractions of a second. He had been carried below and then, for an instant, had come to the surface again for one great gasping breath before being swallowed again by the flood.

In his ears thundered the roar of bursting guns, and his chest felt as if the weight of mountains were crushing it. Then there was a dull sense of falling—falling as if forever—during which one more merciful breath was vouchsafed him before he sank again and lost consciousness. The waters beneath the falls swirled him around and played with him for an instant. Then, relenting, they drifted him against a great rock that slanted down into the river, where the black stream of the pool circled about in a great whirl.

For a long time the body lay there, inert, but fortune had decreed that the mouth and nose of this bit of human jetsam should lie above the flood. A couple of kingfishers darted by, screaming out shrill notes; big fish rose to the surface and made rings; a sand-piper, with swiftly wag-

ging tail, alighted close to him and flew away again, with sibilant squeals of fear. Away above, high in the sky, a great red shouldered hawk wheeled, scanning the land beneath. Upon the opposite side of the pool a mink came forth from a crack in the rocks, darted among some minnows in a shallow pool, and returned with a silvery mouthful.

And then the body, half afloat, began to move. The breath came back to white, pinched nostrils; the eyes opened and closed again, blinking in the sunlight, and the arms slowly shifted their position as the hands began to grope, feebly, and felt the rocky surface. Then the eyes opened again, for a longer time, and looked about, perhaps with the same ghastly astonishment that is seen on the face of a man shot in battle, whom the fierceness of pain only strikes a few moments after the missile has completed its work.

The anguish of bruised limbs, of a body that was a mass of suffering, came to him in full force as the gathering clearness of his mind enabled him to realize it, but his will had returned also, and he found himself able to slowly turn and crawl

away from the numbing iciness of the water in which he had been more than half submerged.

It was then that returned the energy of despair, the instinct to fight on and on, the primal tendency of the wild thing to seek escape with claw and fang from the grasp of the enemy—all these returned to the man, at first as a mere reflex, as a blind obedience to laws established when the first sentient thing was created.

His chattering teeth mattered no longer; he was unconscious of them, for the time; nor did he consider the agony of his bruised body and lacerated skin. These were secondary things. That which mattered was the getting out of the gyves that held him in reach of the grasp of death.

Looking about, he found himself under a ledge of projecting rock, which had doubtless served to conceal him from Mashkaugan's eyes. A few staggering steps brought him to a part of the bank where the great, bare, curling roots of conifers, growing above, gave him a chance to pull himself up, desperately, until he reached a place of safety farther down the stream, where the high floods of spring had cast up a tangled mass of

driftwood, now bleached white by alternating sun and rain.

Chance had saved him once. A little circumstance that would have been of no significance in the midst of civilization again brought him out of jeopardy, for the cold had again begun to numb him, and if he had fallen he would probably have never risen again. One of the first lessons the woods had taught him was this: that whatever else a man might neglect, he must always have dry matches. He searched his pockets and pulled out a box made of a brass shotgun cartridge that was hermetically closed by a tight-fitting wooden plug. There was no strength in his fingers, but the grasp of his teeth loosened the plug. Birch-bark was plentiful, and under his trembling fingers there soon rose a small clear flame on which he piled dry wood from the drift, until at last there was a great roaring blaze before which he lay exhausted, while a steam cloud rose from his garments. In a short time he could breathe again, with some approach to ease, and his face burnt with the fire's nearness. He had to draw back, and pulled off his clothes, hanging them

upon branches until they were dry. The cold that had taken hold of him, and which had at first caused him to stagger like a drunken man, had now quite left him. After a time he dressed himself again, shaking only from a strange nervous strain, and began to realize that he was hungry.

It was at this moment that the full realization came to him that he was alone. In sudden wild panic he called and called till he was hoarse, and his voice echoed among the rocks, booming back mockingly. Then he stopped, abruptly, and forced himself to think.

"Mashkaugan was coming along behind me, and he must have stumbled forward so that the end of the canoe touched me and pushed me over. Then the fellow started to look for me, but he couldn't see me under the shelf, and so of course he made up his mind that I was dead. Then, naturally, he hurried away as if the devil had been after him."

For a brief second the idea struck him as an amusing one. An instant later it brought the realization of his desperate plight, which came to him as a staggering blow that half stunned him,

yet a moment later he was thinking clearly again and struggling with the problem before him. He was only too well aware of Indian superstitions that make them fear the neighborhood of people whose end has come suddenly, and sends them fleeing in terror from the places where bodies have disappeared. Nothing could ever prevail upon them to camp near an old burial place, and some of the very best sites for camping were utterly abandoned because people had died there. He knew that, deep in their hearts and in spite of all the missionaries, most of them believed that Atshoum, chief of all evil spirits, whom they also know as Matshi Manitou, the bad god, seizes upon the spirits of those suddenly taken away and compels them to obey dread commands.

Loveland sank down on the ground again, weakened far more by the consternation brought upon him by these thoughts than by the awful experience through which he had just passed when in the rapids. He had fallen; now he was out of danger from the fierce raging of the stream; it was all in the day's work; a miss was as good as a mile. But the danger still before him seemed

immeasurably greater, and its realization left him haggard and enfeebled, for some minutes. Yet the inherent power of his manhood, the pluck of his race, the desire to fight on, left him but for a short time. He rose again, hoping, full of the instinct of the white man in the vigor of his years to meet a death that shall only overcome him in the lust of battle.

The night was coming apace, and Loveland broke some balsam-boughs for bedding. From the great pile of driftwood he took large pieces which, once alight, would burn long and smoulder for many hours, and placed them on his fire. There was nothing he could do but rest; exhausted nature finally had the upper hand, and he slept soundly for many hours until the chill of night awoke him. The fire was reduced to a few embers which he caused to glow again by stirring them with a stick. More birch-bark helped to renew the fire, which was soon roaring again. Then he slept once more, and no longer heard the great solemn chant of the falls—that might have been clamoring for other lives.

He awoke very early in the morning, as the

stars were beginning to fade away and the rising of the sun was but a great glowing in the east. So frightfully sore were his limbs and body that at first he could scarcely move, but he forced them to new suppleness by stretching them and kneading them with his hands. And then, empty handed, carrying but the precious box of matches and a knife, he started homeward, on a journey that would have been all of a hundred miles by the river, and must be tremendously lengthened along the banks where a thousand obstacles would daily be in his way. By this time his empty stomach was craving for food. Suddenly, among some saplings, he saw a partridge scurrying along, with nearly full-grown young. He was close to the river, where there was a bank of gravel, and went down to pick up some stones with which he might possibly kill something. Loose rocks of a proper size are rare among the mosses and rocks and deep black loams of the forest. He was already desperately hungry and, like any savage of primeval days he must at all times be ready to go forth and kill.

He picked up a pocketful of round pebbles and

followed the beach downstream, knowing that as soon as he was compelled again to take to the deep woods he would be obliged to fight his way through desperate tangles. It was then, again by what seemed like the blindest chance, that occurred a third incident which surely accounts for the fact that his bones are not now bleaching in the woods, torn asunder by bears, foxes or wolverines.

In the shallow water ahead of him his eyes fell upon what looked like a small boulder, lying but partly above the water. Something rather peculiar about its form attracted his attention and he hurried forward, to discover that it was his pack and the flour-bag, still tied together with his tump-line. The flood had evidently rolled these things along the bottom, and they had brought up against a lump of granite and stopped.

With a hoarse cry of joy he leaped into the shallow water and pulled the pack ashore. Again his overwrought nerves caused his hand to shake as he loosened the line to look over his precious find.

The flour-bag was the most important of all.

But for the leak he had discovered on the previous day it would all have been lost. The waterproof bag in which he had placed it, however, had permitted but a small amount of water to penetrate it.

He ran into the wood and got a large sheet of birch-bark, on which he carefully emptied the flour. Some ten pounds of it, on the outside, had become damp and sodden, but from the interior he obtained about twenty pounds that was perfectly dry. At once he lighted another fire and carefully dried the bag, in which he replaced the flour that was uninjured, and after this he made rough round dough-balls of the damp stuff and placed them before the blaze. He filled his mouth with the tasteless stuff, that stuck to his teeth, and ate it hungrily.

After he had enough he investigated the contents of his pack, hurriedly, with an exulting sense of happiness, like a man awaiting death who has obtained a reprieve. He began to feel that perhaps he still had a fighting chance, one that a strong and determined man could grasp and win. He must hasten and use every hour of daylight in

travel, resting only when he could no longer go on, and the flour must be husbanded like a miser's hoard.

He was perfectly well aware of the desperate length of every mile, in an untrodden country where there were no blazed trapping lines to follow, in which he would constantly be sinking in quagmires or compelled to climb rocky ledges and push through thick alder swamps, always trying to keep in sight of the river, or, at any rate, very near its course, because if he wandered any distance away from it he would certainly be lost. There were some places, of course, where there were portages, and others along which men had been accustomed to line their canoes, going up stream and tugging at the long rope, from the shore. In such spots, he knew, he would be able to get on pretty well, but they were few and far between. If he could only have gone off into the hills at the side of the valley the walking would have been much better. There would be fewer tangles and, under the big trees, the young growth would be thinner and hamper him less. The low ground of the valleys through

which streams flow always gives the worst going, but he knew he would seldom dare seek the more open country afforded by the higher land since, under the forest growth, there would be no possibility of recognizing landmarks.

But for the present he thought little of such matters. The thing of immediate import was to reduce his load to the smallest possible weight. At this time a bit of sporting information, gathered by chance during the days of prosperity in England, when he had attended some races, came to his memory.

"One pound, if I am not mistaken," he told himself, "is supposed to handicap a horse eight yards in a one mile run. What must it mean to a weary man over a hundred and fifty of them?"

His heavy blanket was wet, and he dried this also at the fire. Then he found that he had an extra pair of moccasins, in better condition, and discarded those he was wearing. Also he threw away a flannel shirt, some socks, an old coat, a pair of camp slippers, and a box of rifle cartridges that could be of no service, since the gun had remained with Mashkaugan. He sorted out

everything he had, keeping only the things that were indispensable.

During his search he found in the bottom of the bag a small white sack which he remembered having seen his wife Ameou busily preparing. Hitherto he had neglected to look into it, but now he opened it to see whether it did not also contain something that could be discarded. There was a little brass medal, perhaps obtained from the old missionary, and some sewing thread and needles, with a few other things which he put aside as he discovered a little folded piece of white paper. For a moment his eyes dimmed as he recognized the childish writing she had achieved under his tuition, during long nights of the previous winter, and then he read:

Dere Heart Yellow Hair:

Just a bit writin to carry my love with you on travel. Hurry soon home. I wait for you with heart in pain for your going away. Maybe little man baby Yellow Hair waiting for you come back.

With love lik bik mountains. AMEOU.

For a moment he remained perfectly still by the fire on the beach, whose smoke, drifting low,

made a little cloud on the river, traveling slowly toward the southwest, where this woman with love like big mountains was waiting for him, and where, perhaps, the little man baby, as she had quaintly called him, might already be lying on the breast that held such love.

But soon he was very active again and he worked feverishly. The little white sack revealed his small .22 pistol and a box of cartridges for it. There was also a small package of matches done up in a bit of oilcloth. Besides these things he found a pair of the most beautiful buckskin moccasins he had ever seen, gaily decorated with porcupine quills and beads. They were useless for the purposes of his return journey, but he replaced them in the little bag and kept them as if they had been of the greatest value.

All of a sudden Loveland's haste had become maddening. An overwhelming desire to be well on the desperately long journey ahead of him—grim with danger, fraught with all manner of hardship and bitter weariness, haunted by the spectre of hunger, perhaps, and of limbs becoming too weak to continue their toil—nearly overcame

him. It took him but a very few minutes more to make up his pack again and shorten the tumpline for the smaller load, which he finally swung to his forehead, knowing well that its slight weight, something under forty pounds, was destined to often prove a well-nigh intolerable burden. His few years' experience of the great wilderness sufficed to make him fully realize the distressing toil that was ahead of him, the pain he would suffer and the discouragement that must come from time to time, but he plunged into the forest like one in pursuit of some illusive foe that is bearing away all that a man may hold precious and must be overtaken at any cost. But for the love that was awaiting him, the sweet tenderness he had become wonted to, he would surely have been unable to struggle so hard, to make such progress. The mere love of his own life could not have imbued him with the dogged pluck with which he started on this long traverse.

At nightfall, when he stopped, he was exhausted. He had started with an aching body, with a skin so bruised by his passage through the rapids that every inch of it irked him badly.

After an hour or two the hard work limbered him, the hurts troubled him less, and he went on more easily. But in the afternoon the weariness had come, making every step painful and heavy. He had been lucky enough to kill a partridge which he roasted over his fire, impaled on a stick, and ate it with some of the dough made from the damp flour. The sky was clear, fortunately, and he stretched himself on mossy ground, under some big spruces, and slept heavily.

In the morning he started again, and his hurts seemed as bad as ever but the toil assuaged them again, but his task, by this time, had taken the form of an unending sentence at hard labor, during which, for hours at a time, he felt stupefied, stumbling forward like a man in liquor, a feeling which at times underwent swift transitions, during which his every nerve was a-quiver, his senses painfully alert, so that he was glad, in a dull, passive way, when his strange apathy returned and he was able to go forward like a man in some sort of dream. And day after day of this went by, slowly, during which every step he took gave him pain, and the rests he was compelled to take made

it all the harder for him to rise again from the ground and stumble on.

Sometimes, when his mind became alert again, he would begin to count his steps and calculate the days and hours and minutes of his journey—to figure out the distances overcome and the many miles remaining to be covered.

Whenever he came out upon the river bank, from which he never moved away very far, and chanced to see some landmark he remembered, such as a great blasted pine, or a clump of silvery birches, or some great rock lifting its head high out of the river's bed, he was always conscious of a disappointing realization that once again he had overestimated the weary miles he had gone through alder brakes and windfalls and quaking marshes, in which he had sunk to his knees and dragged out his feet, feeling like an old-time convict chained to a great cannon-ball. In a great many places a mile within the hour was an absolutely impossible achievement. There were so many obstacles to be surmounted, so many turns and twists to be made around steep hills and cliffs, that he often journeyed for a mile or two when the

course of the river would have reached the same distance in a few hundred yards. Then there were numbers of affluent streams to be crossed, some mere rivulets that he stepped over, larger ones he could wade through or step over on stones, and deep ones which he would have to follow ever so far before some fallen tree or gravelly shoal would permit his passage. When he stopped at night his clothes were drenched with rain, at times, or only clammy with the sweat of his frightful toil, and even by the side of his fire, and under his blanket, he would awake, shivering, to become slowly unconscious again.

Once he had reached the summit of a fairly high hill, compelled as he had been to go very wide of the river, which flowed between banks winding through an enormous expanse of impassable bog. From the top he saw at a distance the course of the stream, winding in a long majestic curve, far to the south of him, and he plunged through deep woods, confident that he would have no trouble in keeping his direction. He traveled for some hours, over some fairly easy ground among high-timbered rolling hills, and after a time became confused and realized that he was lost.

CHAPTER X

THE BABE IN THE WOODS

LOVELAND'S first and well-nigh irresistible impulse was to throw away his pack and to run, to get out of the maze in some way; but he held himself in, trembling with the effort, and sat down quietly, remembering some hard learned lessons and much good advice he had received from his Indian friends.

The sun, fortunately for him, came out of a great bank of clouds, and he studied its direction carefully. Finally he turned at right angles to the course he had been following, and in a half hour more came out upon the river again, where he found that a half a day's toil had been wasted, for he was but a short distance away from the boggy land, having gained perhaps a mile in some six hours.

Nor was it only the pain in his limbs, or the blistered and stone-bruised feet and the aching

shoulders that troubled him, for his food was but poor stuff for a man on such a journey. He had no fat, nor any tea, nor a grain of salt or sugar. Neither had he any baking powder for his flour, for all these things had been in the provision bags carried by Mashkaugan. The sodden cake he half baked on hot stones, or the raw flour he sometimes ate weighed like lead upon his stomach. Sometimes he would pull out his dough in long strings which he wound about the end of a stick and held in the fire, whence it would come out burnt and fairly crisp, at best something of a change from other forms just as bad. Always he watched keenly for game, yet was able to kill but little. If he chanced to see a partridge he would have to throw down his pack, pull the little pistol out of his pocket and cock the hammer. By the time this was done the bird might have gone some distance away. He would follow, try and see it, and finally lose it in the undergrowth, to return discouraged, conscious that he had taken useless steps. Yet one day he killed three, and feasted greedily, eating two of them that evening and suffering severe pain most of the night. But

he finally slept and ate the other for his breakfast. It was raining and he had a hard time to keep his fire going, so that the meat was nearly raw, but he started away feeling stronger than for several days past. At noon he came in sight of a porcupine climbing a tree, with the nefarious intention of girdling the top by feeding on the softer bark, and killed it with a stone, carrying it down to the river bank, a short distance away. Here he found clay on the bank, of which he plastered a deep layer over the animal, after lighting a big fire of driftwood and dead branches. In the embers he buried his clay covered porcupine and put more fuel above it, until the clay was glowing red and hard as brick, when he poked the mass out of the fire with the end of a stick and, after it had cooled a little, broke it open with a rock. Then he had a feast, the animal being a fat one, cooked to a turn, and he wrapped what was left of it in birch-bark, for the night's meal.

This had been his best day, during the eight he had traveled, but when he stopped at night, on the river bank, and clearly recognized Dead Pine Rapids, he knew that he had not yet covered quite

half of the journey. It began to rain hard and he was lucky to find shelter under a rocky ledge that protected him to some extent from rain and wind, but in the morning he suffered little pain, and went on, very early, under a steady drizzle to which he paid no attention. It was only severe suffering, at this time, that could rouse him from an unfeeling apathy. By this time he had already grown very thin and worn, his cheek bones protruded sharply above his stubbly beard of yellow bristles, and his eyes were sunken and dark like those of a man that has wasted his strength in long vigils.

During the days following he kept on his staggering gait, a very scarecrow in looks, gaunt and covered with clothing torn to shreds by thorns and vines, befouled by ashes and mud, with hands raw and bleeding from his defence against the tangled vegetation that sought to hold him back. Yet at this time much of his keenness of feeling returned and he knew the awful weariness of the man to whom inanimate things have become personal enemies keeping up an endless persecution. There is a time when the mere dragging of one's

feet from the black ooze becomes a torture; when branches that bar the way become malignant snares and fallen trunks that cannot be stepped over are regarded as the wiles of fiends united in conspiracy, trying one's soul to the verge of madness.

And yet, at times, glimmerings of hope would return, a sense of comparative well-being, generally brought on by some merciful half-hour during which he would find fair going in forests of straight trunks where there were no windfalls or where the trees, shutting off the air and light from below, had prevented the growth of smaller bushes and shrubs. It also occurred when he could travel for some time along the river bank, and at such times he would feel as if he had been delivered from shackles, and go on for a time until quagmires again barred the way or a tangle of deciduous trees halted him and compelled him to circle about the impenetrable clumps.

There were times when he might have collapsed and wept, during moments of utter exhaustion, when his limbs utterly refused obedience to his will and felt like dead things, but the sweating

of his body and the thinness of his poorly nourished frame had doubtless dried the source of tears. Came two days during which he tramped steadily in a downpour that never knew a moment's ceasing. The summer-warmed earth, moistened with the water from clouds that had gathered from the far north, began to steam and smoke until a thick mist obscured his vision, and he moved uncertainly, in the drab and dripping world, like a man groping in partial blindness.

On several occasions he sank down on soggy moss and rotting leaves, without the slightest intention of resting, and was overcome by a sudden sleep from which he awakened in the fear that he had lost precious hours, for there is no doubt that through all his suffering, all the scarce endurable toil and the hours that passed by and of which he sometimes was scarcely conscious, the fierce, dogged courage of the man was yet alight in his soul, and could never have died away while his heart continued to beat. Often he had the fear of defeat impending, but never did he believe that it was yet at hand, or that the struggle was over. He would start off, after those help-

less periods of sleeping wherever he had fallen, hurrying breathlessly, until his stiffened limbs would rebel at his speed and he would begin to stumble, or walk with the tottering gait of some very decrepit old man.

It began to seem like ages since he had started from the White Rapids. He had utterly lost the count of days. Sometimes he got the impression that he had been journeying for months and that there never could be an end to his going, but always he knew he must keep on.

Very early one morning he started again, his head confused with the strange delirium of over-exertion, hardly caring whether he ever reached his goal and obsessed merely by the idea that he must go on. A very few minutes later the river had disappeared and was changed to a small lake, over which he puzzled dully, till suddenly his brain became active again and he realized that he was on the shore of Amishkapi, or Many Beaver Lake, which is but a few hours' travel from Tshemuak Post in a canoe. Had there been one at his disposal he could have gone the length of the pond and entered the outlet, in perhaps a half an

hour. Then he could have sat quietly in the bottom and let the thing drift, with the fallen leaves and dry branches, and finally have come in sight of the post. The few miles that remained for him to walk seemed of endless length, but a little strength had returned to his body. He would certainly arrive at his destination, at the very latest, on the evening of the next day.

For a time he found fair walking and his heart was wonderfully lightened, for his home was almost in sight. He was compelled to keep at some distance from the shore of the lake, for it was reedy, with a soft mud bottom. Then he vaguely noted the tracks of a man who had been there but recently, for the blades of grass were still pressed down. Had he been less exhausted the sight of these would have cheered him immensely, but he accepted their presence dully, hardly realizing that it meant his coming within reach of his fellowmen. But he followed them, instinctively, and they brought him out to a place on the shore, among the reeds, where a canoe had landed —but it was no longer there. Retracing his steps he followed the tracks inland. The walking was

easy, there was nothing to hold him back; he only had to follow those tracks, a double set, going and returning, clearly marked on moss and oozy soil, till they went into slightly higher ground.

He stopped, suddenly, in foolish astonishment.

At the foot of a big tree and resting on a bed of moss, there was an infant, wrapped in a tiny blanket and clad in soft things of buckskin. It was sound asleep.

For a moment Loveland looked dully at the baby, hardly seeming to understand. Then the baby wakened and cried feebly, as if weak with hunger.

At this the man, still dazed, knelt down and took the little thing in his arms, hardly knowing what he was doing, stumbled off with it, stupidly, tramping on with the same staggering gait that had become mechanical, a mere motion seemingly evolved without reason or cause.

An hour later a woman by the name of Uapukun, the wife of Atuk, a Nascaupee, who was camping on Many Beaver Lake, netting whitefish for the winter's provision, as he had some dogs

to feed, opened her eyes in wonder and stared at a strange apparition.

A man clad in woeful rags was staggering towards her, and yet he did not appear to see her. His face was rough with a beard of some weeks' growth, and he was soiled with the dirt of many days, clay from the banks and black ooze from muskegs and ashes from fires, which cold water and rain alone had been unable to remove.

The man carried a pack, that was very small and yet seemed to crush him with its weight, while in his arms he held a weeping child.

At this time the woman called to him, and the man lifted up his head as one suddenly awakened from a dream. He swayed, caught his balance, and rushed towards her, still stumbling and much bent in body. Then he pushed out his hands and placed the baby in her arms, after which he stared at her for a moment and then rolled on the ground at her feet, an inert mass.

The woman Uapukun gave a shrill cry which brought her husband running to her. He bent down, felt the man's wrist, and took from the fire a kettle of strong tea, of which he poured some

into Loveland's mouth, who swallowed, greedily. Then the woman put the child down for a moment and helped her husband drag the young man within her tent, where they covered him with warm blankets and brought him food, of which he took a little, falling asleep with a piece of boiled fish still in his mouth.

"He is not wholly starved," said Atuk, "though he has surely had but little to eat, but never have I seen a man so utterly bereft of his strength. For many days must he rest quietly, sleeping and eating in turn, and then perhaps he will be like other men again."

Uapukun, who had a little baby of her own, looked at the man, compassionately, after which she picked up the newly arrived infant from the bed of boughs on which she had placed it, and put it to her kindly bosom. In a short time it was also sleeping in peace, covered with a blanket of soft rabbit skins, and the woman went back to her occupation of cleaning and splitting the glittering fish.

CHAPTER XI

BARGAINING

While Loveland had been waging a fight for his life that is to this day talked of by the Indians of the north, since nothing in the world appeals to them so powerfully as tremendous pluck and great physical achievement, the chief agent of Tshemuak had sought to further his own ends. It was several days before he took courage to talk of them to Mashkaugan, nor did he speak openly and frankly, only giving slight hints concerning his intentions towards Ameou's little child. At his very first mention of such things, however, he was met with an angry snarl, the man turning swiftly towards him and glaring.

"Shut up and leave me alone," cried the hunchback, bringing his great fist down on the table. "Since I have returned from that hellish place of fiends my food has not nourished me, for I have no taste for it. Neither can I get sleep for as

soon as my eyes close there comes before them that face I saw upturned in the rapids! Ay, and sometimes there are devils around it who thrust it at me! I am accursed because of thee, and the day is coming when thou shalt have thy share of the curse!"

"Thou art crazy, Mashkaugan," answered Curran, sneering at him. "It looks to me as if thy brain were becoming more crooked than thy body. Come, we are old friends and know many things! The two of us will be rich some day. In a day or two thy head will be clear and thou wilt understand better. These devils of thine are nothing but silly dreamings that come because thy food still lies heavy on thy stomach. Thou drinkest too much strong tea!"

But the half-breed made him no answer, except to cast an evil glance at him before he returned to his shack, where he now spent many hours alone, in idleness, crouching before a small fire, sucking at a foul old pipe. The other Indians, always feeling that there was something uncanny about him, since a man deformed is one upon whom the evil spirits have at some time vented their anger,

held him in some sort of fear and avoided him, so that he was undisturbed. Sometimes, instead of taking his meals at the post he would go into the store, help himself to whatever he wanted, and eat alone, perhaps going off into the woods by himself and returning when the spirit moved him, until Curran also began to feel that something was wrong with him, and fraught with danger.

Ameou was sitting before her tent, a woeful picture of a woman who had suffered the greatest sorrow. She was bent over her little child, who slept quietly and whose tiny features brought memories of the man she was mourning for. Curran went up to her, for he was constantly seeking to make a good impression upon her and show the utmost friendliness.

"Ameou," he said, "my heart is very sore for thee, and for the great loss I have also sustained. But thou must keep thyself strong for the baby's sake, and there is no reason to deprive thyself of anything thou mayest need. The weather is becoming cold; is there no need of more blankets? The door of the store-room is open. Help thyself, or I will get them for thee, and food also.

Wilt thou have some tea? It is the way of white men as of Indians that what belonged to the man is the wife's and the child's. Always come to me and thou shalt have everything according to thy needs, because I am thy friend, as I was the friend of Uapishiu of the Yellow Hair."

The young woman looked at him. She could not quite overcome the feeling of repulsion she always had for him, but yet she was impressed by the kindness of his words.

"I thank thee," she answered, speaking low and softly, "but the time of my staying here is becoming short now. In seven days, or perhaps ten at the most, my father will be leaving for the winter's hunting, away in the Ishekoto country, over towards the setting sun, and I will go away with him, for it is coming to me that the sight of this place where I have had such happiness and such sorrow is more than I can bear! I shall be of use to him, for I am strong in a canoe. His wife I can help, and him also, for he is becoming old. Some of the traps I can attend to, and set snares for rabbits and prepare the pelts that are caught, as I have done since I was a child."

This troubled the agent exceedingly, and he sought to dissuade her from this purpose, saying that she must not go away, and that provisions in plenty and all other things she might need would be hers for the asking. He spoke of the greater comfort of the main building in the days when the frost would cause great trees to split asunder, of the good warm stove that would ever be burning, of the two old people who would wait on her so that she need not move a hand unless she wanted to. When Ameou shook her head, firmly, he sought to influence her with other argument.

"Thou must remember that the child is the son of Yellow Hair, who was a white man. His father would have wanted the boy to be brought up as are the sons of the whites, who have to learn many things that are not in thy mind. Therefore he should be kept here, where there are white people, and grow up as a man of that race."

"But he has no father now!" cried Ameou. "He is my child and will follow the life of my own people! I am again but one of the Indians who are here to-day and gone to-morrow, and he goes

with me! The man who might have taught him other ways is dead, and no other man can take his place!"

"But there are others who may teach him!" exclaimed Curran. "I shall surely do so myself when he grows old enough, for the love I bore my friend. I will show him the ways of the white people and he will learn to speak their tongue, both French and English!"

"The ways of white people!" cried the young woman. "They surely have some that are bad, for even my husband Uapishiu told me so, many a time. Yes, they surely have some that are evil."

She was looking at him intently, with big frank eyes, and doubtless meant no more than she said, but it made Curran very uneasy because, like all men who have wrought evil, he was always wondering how much others might know or suspect. For this reason he could find no answer and merely nodded his head in a manner that might have signified anything.

"Moreover, this talk of his learning is useless at this time," pursued the young mother. "There

is nothing for him to know saving the way of his lips to my breast. By the time he has gathered strength and bigness we may speak again of the things he will have to know. I shall go with Nimissuts, my father!"

To this Curran made no reply and went away slowly, with his hands in his pockets, trying to look unconcerned though his thoughts worried him deeply. A few moments later he chanced to come across the old chief, who was sitting on the ground and sharpening his axe with the small file that is one of the northern Indian's most valued treasure. Curran went slowly to him and sat down beside him, on the river bank and slowly shaved tobacco from his plug.

"By the way, Nimissuts, thy daughter tells me that she is going to follow thee into the big woods where thy hunting grounds are, to the west," he finally said, with assumed indifference.

The old chief looked at him for a moment, keenly, after which he merely nodded in assent for he was not a man of many words.

"I am glad to see that thou art fat and in good health," continued Curran. "Thou and thy fam-

ily have lived well, and perhaps without much thought of the help thy daughter Ameou caused thee to have."

"It was according to the word given by Loveland Yellow Hair," replied the old man quietly. "It has all been marked down in the manner he ordered."

"True enough, old man, but now that Yellow Hair is dead he will no longer get pay from the company. Thou art getting on in years and thy days of hunting are coming to a close. Many years ago no one else was thy equal in the setting of traps and the bringing of great loads of pelts, but this year thy hunt was not very large, and some other men did better by far."

"I took all I was minded to," replied the old man, "one must leave enough so that, another year, there shall be plenty of young to grow. Yet I know well that when a man grows old there must be those who will overtake him. It has always been thus. Still I am good for many hunts yet, and able to toil hard."

"But there is no reason for thy taking so much pains," said Curran, rolling the tobacco he had

cut in the palms of his hands and stuffing it into the bowl of his pipe. "Thou knowest that if thou art not wise the day may come when thou shalt not return to thy tent, so that another year thy bones may be found on thy trapping line, where in some blizzard thou wert compelled to lie down for the last time. Then will the women of thy household be left without a man while thy wife's and daughter's young ones will know the great hunger. There is no need of such happenings."

The old chief was becoming interested, knowing that all this roundabout talk had a distinct object. It was of course, according to Indian custom, just the sort of speech he deemed proper between men approaching the real matter in hand. Whether considered as an evidence of childish and transparent simplicity, or in the light of guile and cunning, is of no special import—bargaining is bargaining, and men selling pelts or buying a new gun need many days to decide upon their final action. Hence old Nimissuts continued to ply his file, interrupting the work to pass his horny thumb over the edge, from time to time, to judge the keenness of the axe-blade.

There was a long interval of silence, during which Curran lit his pipe and puffed away, indifferently, with a look of the greatest unconcern. Finally he judged he had waited long enough.

"Hast thou thought of these women and children?" he asked, watching the flight of some mergansers over the river.

"Ay, strong and stout women they are, able to carry good packs and good in a canoe. I think that by this time the axe is well sharpened. It is a good one. Oh yes! About the women! Thou shouldst see my wife at the netting of whitefish and the stretching of pelts. The work she is able to do is that of a strong man, young and well fed.

"As to my daughter she is the child of my younger days, when I was very strong. Never have I seen one better able to work, whether in camp or at the traveling. Neither of them, after I die, will have trouble about getting a man to help in the trapping. Thou knowest that the hunting-grounds among our people always belong to the woman, who inherits from her own mother. Now Anishku, my wife, and Ameou, who is the

daughter of my first woman, have good trapping-places that were owned by their people long before the white men ever came to this place and made the big tents of logs.

"Now that Ameou is a widow there will be many to seek her, not only for the sake of the goodness of her hunting land, but also on account of her great beauty. Hast thou ever noticed that she is very well-favored?"

"Well, she is not ill-looking," admitted Curran, after some consideration.

"As to Anishku, she might find suitors even if I lived for a half-score years yet. Moreover, by that time her two sons would be grown men and strong. Both are already able to paddle, and great snarers of rabbits and partridges."

The old man began to scrape out the bowl of his pipe, suggestively, and Curran handed him a plug.

"I have it in mind that I shall remain here for many years," said Curran after another silence. "I might need a woman to look after the big house for me and perhaps bear sons for me. I do not wish to speak to Ameou just now, because

she is still grieving much; but I might perhaps consider the taking of her as a wife. If this happened there would be nothing to hinder thy remaining here all the year, quietly, with no toil, always in the midst of plenty for thyself and thine. Yes, I might perhaps think of such a thing."

The old man had long ago discerned the drift of all this beating about the bush. He shook his head evasively, as if the matter were one of very small concern; yet he was by no means displeased, for many good reasons besides the fact that it was no small thing to be father-in-law to a chief agent, a mighty man. Loveland had certainly proved a very liberal son-in-law, and the lines of the chief's living, since his daughter's marriage, had indeed been cast in pleasant places. He had not the slightest objection to renewing such an agreeable state of affairs.

"Ameou is a very fine woman," he said at last. "Like her there can be very few for beauty and diligence. Look at the shoepacks she can make, and how she works upon buckskin! A few weeks hence, or some time when I find that her sorrow is less, I may speak to her of this matter. Later on

may the two of us agree upon what I should get for the woman, as is our custom, but this may not be till I come back from my hunting, after the breaking of the ice."

Curran merely grunted an answer, nodding. So far everything was all right, though he hated the idea of the girl's leaving, fearing she might perhaps prevail upon her father to trade at some other post. That, of course, was a danger, but by no means a likely one, as the old man, scenting gain, would certainly insist on returning to Tshemuak. Of course he had no particular prejudice against the idea of paying for a wife.

This custom, in its origin, was hardly the evil one we are apt to consider it. It always was the woman who inherited the hunting grounds from which the husband was to get the benefit. It was, therefore, just and equitable that the man should pay for the double privilege of marrying the woman and obtaining something that was equivalent to a dowry, sometimes of considerable value. Curran, however, was not at all concerned by any questions of propriety or morality. Scruples, whether large or small, had never come in the

way of any of his actions. To ride roughshod over all obstacles had ever been his method of overcoming them. His ambition was great and all-absorbing. An adventurous career had led him in many places and he had seen a good deal of the world. This had brought visions of a life only possible to the master of much money, filled with the image of men and women with whom existence was a perpetual feasting in purple and fine linen, among tables laden with wine, driving fast horses or visiting brilliantly lighted places of amusement. These things were now in his grasp and he would crush anything that might stand in the path leading to them.

For some time the two men held further conversation, which was interrupted by the coming of a young man who informed them that two canoes were coming from the south. So rare were visitors that they rose at once and, going down to the beach, watched the arrival of the boats which proved to be occupied by some Nascaupees who had been drying fish for a couple of weeks, on a lake to the southward, whose outlet led into the Tshemuak. Having all they wanted, they were

stopping at the post for some goods they needed before continuing on their journey northeast, for their winter's hunt.

The trading, of course, even if it should have amounted but to the purchase of a few needles for the women, was a matter not be lightly undertaken. For a good many hours the newcomers, crowded in the store, kept Curran busily engaged, till his patience began to wear very thin and was on the point of breaking. All the other Indians who had not yet departed had to come in also, to see the fun and exchange gossip, filling the room with the smoke of strong tobacco and spitting in the stove while the agent haggled about the credit he was willing to extend, until, in his restlessness, he was ready to consign them all to perdition.

CHAPTER XII

THE NEW PARTNER

FINALLY, to Curran's great relief, the store began to empty. Such weighty matters occupied his mind that trifling purchases and long arguments held for the mere pleasure of bargaining irked him unbearably. What did such trivialities amount to? In a few months, or perhaps at most a year, he would be for ever through with such work, no longer buried in a place that was a month's journey away from a white man's face. He had enough of such slavery. Freedom would soon be his, with money in plenty wherewith to make the most of it.

He called upon old man Cyprien to replace on the shelves some bolts of cotton goods he had shown the Indian women, and noticed that one of the newcomers had remained, and was looking at him significantly. He was an ill-favored fellow known as Ituaganu, or Scarface, because in

former years a bear, with a sweep of his great paw, had partly torn one of the man's cheeks away.

Scarface looked about him cautiously, to see whether the coast was clear, and Curran, understanding, went up to him.

"Come into the other room," he told the man.

As soon as they were alone the Indian pulled from beneath his coat the pelt of a cross-fox. It was a skin of very fine quality, very closely approximating a true silver, for only a few reddish hairs showed at the sides. It was worth a large price.

Curran looked at it, brushed back the soft fur, inspected the inner side for cuts or bullet mark and studied every inch of the pelt for possible defects.

"It is yet very early in the year," he said briefly.

"The nights have been cold for a long time. Muskrats and mink already have heavy coats," replied Scarface. "This fox I only caught ten days ago, for I had seen many tracks near the place where we were fishing. Thou canst see that the hair is thick and long already. It is going to be a cold winter, surely, for the beaver are making

great provision of poplar, and building strong and high their dams. This skin could not be better during the coldest days of winter. If it is not wanted I will go down to the factories on the great bay, for it is indeed a good skin."

Curran had no mind to let it slip away from him, and until nightfall they discussed the price and haggled bitterly.

The agent had decided that this was one of the pelts the big Company never need know anything about. The upshot of their final transaction was that the Indian went away with ten or twelve dollars' worth of goods, beside a Winchester rifle and a bottle of strong drink, all of which he had gladly accepted for a skin surely worth three or four hundred. At any of the posts nearer civilization he would have obtained a much higher price, but Tshemuak was remote indeed from such places.

Curran, as was his habit in such cases, had, under the influence of vague threats, exacted a promise of utter secrecy in regard to the transaction; also he had forbidden the man to do any drinking until after he had left the post. Such a trade as he

occasionally carried on was a prison matter and had been the cause of Mashkaugan's first undoing. If anything happened to the fellow, far out in the woods, it would bother the agent not at all. There was no doubt that theft of the Company's goods and the selling of liquor to Indians was an easy way of making money. By selling the pelt, with a few others, on his own account, he would get enough to provide for expenses he might be put to before he could obtain Loveland's inheritance.

It is rather hard, however, to depend on an Indian, or, for that matter, upon any other man with a strong taste for drink. Scarface, in spite of his promises, soon decided that a small taste of the liquor was a joy that would brook no postponement. In order to be compelled to share it with no one he went off a short distance into the woods. The first strangling swallow of diluted alcohol brought tears to his eyes but joy to his heart. In spite of his coughing it was a rapture greater than any. The dram he had swallowed, he soon decided, had been altogether too small, and he took another, followed by a third, and

was soon nearly half-seas over, though still in fair control of himself.

It chanced that Ituaganu was a widower, anxious to marry again. He issued from the woods where he had gone away to tipple, considering that he had done a good stroke of business in concealing his valued possession from his friends. His way led him near the tent of old Nimissuts, and he saw Ameou standing near the fire with her baby in her arms. She paid no attention, staring as she was into the blaze, and he lurched over towards her. His condition apparently did not prevent his appreciation of feminine beauty and charm. The notion came into his head that this was the very moment in which to express it, unmistakably, and he suddenly put his hand on the young woman's shoulder. As she quickly moved to one side the heavy paw fell on the baby's head, and at once the latter yelled like a true scion of civilization.

The fierce instinct that lies dormant in every woman's breast when her offspring is in danger and needs defence was instantly roused. Ameou uplifted her hand and struck the man's face,

wildly, so that he fell over, bawling, and staggered off, muttering threats and sobered enough to know he was in danger, if men came to her assistance.

Curran had happened to stroll down, perhaps intending to have more talk with Nimissuts, and had witnessed the happening. He ran up and hustled the man off to his tent, shaking him none too gently. And then an idea struck him, suddenly, a very stroke of genius the thought of which made him gasp. After leaving Scarface, who had dropped upon his blanket, he returned to the post, his face twisted into the smile that was a harbinger of some evil act.

In the morning he sent for Ituaganu who came up to the storeroom, showing some evidence of the evening's excesses. The man's first action was to beg for a drink, having failed to find his bottle for the excellent reason that Curran, on the previous evening, had taken it away from him while he was rather dazed, what with liquor and striking his head against a tent-picket.

"Not a single drop shalt thou have," affirmed Curran, with an air of great virtue. "What kind

of a man art thou to break all thy promises, and then to let a woman beat thee like a puny child? Yes, even like a dog she chastised thee and called thee a dog, and here thou art now, whining like a pup with a thorn in his foot."

"Did she indeed call me a dog?" cried the man, angrily.

"Ay, that she did, and many other names, too many to remember, saying that thou wert no man, but a *kukush*, a swine and the son of swine. And thou wert weeping before her like an *ouash*, a little baby."

"Mighty powerful is thy strong water, for certainly I remembered none of those things," said Scarface, frowning. "But give me just one small swallow of the stuff to still the burning there is in my throat and I will show thee what manner of man I am."

"What! Thou wouldst go and strike her back! It takes not much of a man to brawl and go about beating women. No such thing will I permit at the post."

"I shall let no woman beat me and boast of her doing, and call me such names as thou hast

told me!" cried the man, angrily. "The very children would laugh at me in scorn. Now I will repay her and give her sorrow, that she may never again go about telling of what she did to me."

"Remember that I will have no quarreling and fighting around the post," Curran told him, warningly. "If thou hast a mind to play her some trick I do not care. A man of good cunning might have a good idea, for instance the stealing for a day of that infant who weeps so much, crying at all times like Utshiminssu, that is ever squalling and making much ado over nothing.

"If a man were clever, and hid himself for a time, till he could steal that *ouash*, and concealed it for a day from her, so that she would search and weep, it would give her sorrow in plenty. Yes, many other things a clever man might think of. But mind thee, no blows or I shall skin thy pelt from thee."

"Give me but one drink," said Scarface, "and thou shalt see what I can do."

"No, it will not do. After the thirst comes back thou wilt return for more, and in an hour or two the *ouash* will be found, so that it will be a

silly trick. And thou wilt tell them that I told thee to do it, which is not true, for I merely spoke of the matter to prevent thy doing worse things."

"Give me but the half of a bottle and I will not return at all before the breaking up of the ice, when the grass is green and the leaves are on the aspens. I will tell thee plainly where I will put the child, and thou canst pretend to find it in the search and bring it back to the woman after she has wept."

"Very well," said Curran. "Here is a small drink now. At night I shall wait by the canoes and have a half a bottle of the strongest for thee, for I am kind of heart. But I doubt much whether thou art a man enough to get a child from its mother without her knowing it. It would take the cunning of *Mitsheshu* the fox. By the way, where wilt thou leave it, that I may surely bring it back."

"Thou wilt find it at the Lake of Many Beavers, on the right hand shore, where a great fallen yellow birch lies in the water. I shall go through the reeds and walk a little way in the woods. The ground is soft and my tracks will be plain. It

is but a few hours away in a canoe and thou knowest the place well. After I leave the *ouash* there I will go on my way, for I have a long journey before me and am afraid of the ice closing the rivers."

"Yes, I know the place very well, and so I will let thee play this trick. But if a word of our speaking together about this matter ever leaves thy lips, be sure that thou shalt never trade here again, or get another drop of strong water, and I will give thee a bad name with the company, so that none will trade with thee. Have a care!"

The agent then poured out a small drink for the man and bade him be gone, after which he went again to look at the fox-pelt, which he packed away very carefully where no one would find it, placing pepper and spices in the fur so that no harm might come to it from the little white moths that lay their eggs in the spring.

That night, in the early hours before dawn, when the sleep of all people should be soundest, Scarface crawled in front of the tent of Nimissuts. The night was not too cold, though the mosquitoes had already ceased their pestering, and so the flap

of the tent was open, to let in the air. With infinite precautions the savage craftily wormed his way in, lifted the child from its little bed of warm rabbit skins, which overlay a thick caribou hide, and dashed away with it to the shore where Curran was waiting for him.

"I have been thinking," said Scarface, "and have it in mind that thou hast perhaps also a grudge against this woman."

"No! It is true that she mocked me sorely when I would have taken her to wife," replied the agent, "but that matters nothing and I wish her no harm. It will be but a thing to laugh at afterwards. Here is thy strong water, but if a drop passes thy lips before laying the child in that safe place thou shalt have to answer for it. Hurry away now, lest anyone should awaken and see us. It is good the night is dark. Hasten away for the child might cry, or the mother awaken suddenly. Get in the canoe, swiftly. Good, thou hast it ready packed. Travel swiftly and do not dare come back. Away with thee now!"

The Indian laid his bundle down on the bags that were already packed in the canoe and pushed

out into deep water. But for the darkness Curran might have seen the grinning of his ugly face, but he disappeared under the shadow of the big trees lining the shore and was swallowed up.

Then Curran returned to the post, stepping lightly, and threw himself upon his bed, much elated at his scheme. It was full of many beautiful possibilities. He drew the blankets over him and was soon sleeping soundly, since slumber, like the rain, may fall upon the just and the unjust, at times, and he was weary with long watching by the river bank.

CHAPTER XIII

THE STEALING OF LITTLE YELLOW HAIR

The stars were paling before the advent of a new day. Over the world had gathered the stillness which precedes the coming dawn. The animals that prowl in the night had sought their lairs again and hooting night birds had ceased their clamoring. The breeze which usually comes just before the rising of the sun had not yet begun to blow, and the few remaining golden leaves of birches and aspens had ceased for a time to flutter down to the ground or strew the still surface of the river.

All this great silence was suddenly interrupted by a wild cry that arose in one of the tents. It was the piercing shriek of a woman who had been robbed of her young.

The young mother had awakened from a heavy sleep which her long nights of sorrowing had finally brought to her, mercifully. In the darkness of the canvas shelter her hand had gone out, in-

stinctively, to feel for her child, to gather some meed of comfort by laying her fingers on the little form of her slumbering baby.

At first she vaguely supposed that in some manner it must have moved in its sleep, and her hand wandered farther out, among the soft skins, without meeting the object of her search. Then terror suddenly seized her and her blanket was cast off with a fierce sudden motion prompted by wild anguish. She crawled about the floor of the tent and threw the flap wide open, hardly realizing that her little Yellow Hair would have been utterly unable to creep so far away. On her hands and knees she crawled about the floor of the tent, awakening the others, who leaped up from their couches. The realization that her baby was missing came to her with the suddenness of a blow. Her piercing shriek awoke all the other tent-dwellers—and even Curran, who had slumbered away without the slightest care for the grief he would cause.

They came hurriedly, barefooted, pulling on some of their clothes discarded for the night, inquiring what the trouble might be, and were met

by the old chief Nimissuts and his wife, who were running about aimlessly, searching in most unlikely places, and by a wild-eyed woman who was dashing from one person to another, fiercely demanding her child and sobbing out her distress. She met nothing but faces full of amazement; men shook their heads, helplessly, and women spoke volubly, making a thousand unlikely suggestions.

Mashkaugan of the Crooked Back had been one of the first to be aroused by all this clamor. As soon as he heard the news his suspicions fell upon Curran; but he met the agent hurrying towards them, coming half dressed from the post building, and shrewdly decided that he had probably taken no part in the actual stealing.

"It—it must have been Scarface the Nascaupee!" suddenly screamed Ameou, who ran down to the place where many canoes were upturned on the beach. The one she sought was gone, and the other people dashed off with her to the tent of the travelers who had come on the previous day. They knew nothing, saving that the man was gone with his outfit. He had merely traveled and

fished with them, but his hunting grounds were far away from theirs, to the northeastward.

"He is the one who has stolen my little man Yellow Hair!" cried Ameou in a voice that was becoming hoarse. "I must follow him, to the end of the world I shall follow him! Let me alone, I must go, I tell you!"

She shook off some people who sought to restrain her, and refused to listen to Curran, who had come forward at once and sought to dissuade her. He told her that it could be nothing but a mean trick played by the man, in revenge. He swore that an immediate search would be begun, for he would send canoes at once, lightly laden so that they might travel fast and manned by strong men, yes, the very best. And a new gun he would give, yes, a gun that shot many times, to the man who found the child.

He made bold to cry out that he would move heaven and earth himself to find the little child. He would bring it back in his own arms, and when the man Scarface should be found he would be punished so severely that the memory of it would last him as long as the scar which the bear had

put upon him, and be remembered of all men, from the great Bay to the places where the brigades came from.

He was talking loudly and forcibly, for effect, a mummery that greatly impressed many of the others. He made much pretense of going to work at once to discover the kidnapper, and called out orders until many men were bringing out spare clothing and their guns, with some provisions, and getting their canoes afloat.

And yet Ameou hardly listened to him, or to any others, being distracted with her grief and fear. Once, when Curran stood before her, trying to prevail on her to remain quiet and lie down for some rest, she roughly pushed him out of her way and ran off to the storeroom of the post whence she came bearing a small armful of provisions, paying not the slightest heed to all the advice that was being poured upon her from all sides.

Out of the tent she brought her pack-bag with blankets in it, and stuffed the food in it, hastily. Then she ran to the post building and entered the room she had once occupied with her husband,

emerging with his repeating rifle, which had been placed there after it had been brought back by Mashkaugan.

The hunchback, in the meanwhile, had calmly lighted a torch of birch-bark and was carefully searching the river-bank at the place where Scarface had drawn up his canoe, on his arrival at Tshemuak. He was examining the ground minutely, all the way down to the water's side, and came to a spot where there was a distinct broad mark on the sandy gravel, close to the very edge. At once he recognized its meaning, for the most insignificant detail could hardly escape the constant close observation of such a woodsman.

He had already noted that Scarface used a rather broad paddle. This mark had been made by the end of its blade. From its form and direction he could see that it had been printed in pushing the canoe away, down the stream, towards the north.

The girl Ameou came down, hurrying with her bag and gun, for her own canoe was near at hand. She had no thought of where she ought to seek, being only moved by a maddening desire to hunt and

search, here and there, until she fell from exhaustion. As she put the things down on the beach Mashkaugan took up her canoe, lifting it as if it had been a feather, and pushed it into the water. Ameou, hardly noticing him, quickly threw in it the things she had brought down, but Curran was hurrying towards her.

"Look here, Ameou! You mustn't go off like that," he protested. "We are going to begin our hunting as soon as the sun is risen. You may depend on it that I will find your child for you—have no fear, it cannot be dead. The man has probably gone upstream, but canoes are going to search both up and down, everywhere, leaving no corner unsought."

"Go then and look!" cried the young woman hoarsely. "Go find my baby for me! All I have in the world I will give to the man who brings him back to me, and I will kneel before him and give thanks! But leave me alone, I must seek also."

"You will give all you have in the world! Is this true talk?" asked Curran, eagerly, with the light of victory in his eyes.

"All—all I have in the world! Nothing else matters," she shrieked, "if you will only find him for me."

"Perhaps I will be the one to gain that reward!" he cried excitedly.

But she paid no more heed to him. He was in her way, delaying her, and she passed by him and seized her paddle, with which she stood up in the canoe, about to push away from shore when Mashkaugan followed her, also armed with a short wide-bladed paddle of fine even-grained spruce.

"Take thou the bow," he told her. "Thou shalt not go alone—and who is there here that can take thee more swiftly than I?"

Curran was dismayed at this turn of affairs but could not protest. Indeed he had some hope that Mashkaugan understood, and that he would help fool the woman. His worst fear was that they might chance to find the child. If the hunchback were turning against him, like a crazy idiot, there was certainly no man that could be more certainly depended on to carry out such a search. What ailed the fool, anyway? He was no longer the same, with his constant surly snarling and his

silly dread of Indian spooks. How dared he go away with the girl without first consulting with him?

Curran had expected to go off very soon to Many Beaver Lake, but now he would have to wait a little. It would not do to follow the others too closely. If they failed to turn to the right, up the first affluent stream, they would go on much farther and would never see him go off towards Many Beaver. But if they went to this lake it would not do for him to get there while they were poking around the shores. They would see him land, follow him, and perhaps suspect something. There was plenty of time in which to find the brat, when no one would be around. Then, in her gratitude, Ameou would probably consent to marry him, and that part of the plan would be settled and accomplished. Of course he had entertained no idea of getting rid of the child by letting it die of hunger in the woods, for such an expedient would be altogether too dangerous. Eventually Scarface would talk, and Ameou or her friends would learn of Curran's share in the plot.

The chief agent had no mind for a sudden ending of his career with a sheath-knife planted in his back, some day, by a revengeful woman. When the time came to get rid of the infant it would be very easy to find an opportunity to give him a few drops of a drug from the medicine-box. It would be altogether too simple to worry much about. They would be in the wilderness; no one would know why the child fell asleep and never awakened; no prying doctors would be there to suspect anything.

And then, after all, it was hardly possible that Ameou and Mashkaugan might find that baby. They certainly couldn't unless they chanced to turn square away into the Mukumeshu River, and this wasn't in the direct line of Scarface's travel to his grounds, although he could reach them by a roundabout trip through Many Beaver.

After he had weighed all the chances he grew less anxious and made his canoe ready in leisurely fashion, after he had sent off some parties on wild-goose chases of his own contriving, so that all should know how diligently he had conducted the search, and be impressed with the idea that his

own finding of the baby was purely a matter of chance. It worried him to remember that, in his loud talking, he had perhaps shown too much confidence in his being able to discover it. It might look queer. But then Ameou would be so overjoyed at getting the brat again that she wouldn't give the matter another thought. What queer creatures women were, anyway!

So he waited quietly for the breakfast the old woman Anne was hurriedly preparing for him, and ate hungrily. In a few moments, now that the sun was beginning to show over the edges of the woodland, he would quietly go along down river. After he had made perfectly certain that no one was observing him he would go straight to the place of concealment and find the child, who would be probably yelling with hunger, and bring it back like a conquering hero. And then, a little later, he would claim the fulfillment of the girl's promise, putting his own interpretation on it, and that money would become very nearly in his grasp. She would sign anything he put before her and the rest was child's play.

The man's eyes narrowed down and his teeth

showed between his thin lips. He was thinking of that drug, and went to the box that held the few medicines with which the post was provisioned. Yes, the bottle marked "Laudanum" was there, nearly full. It was queer, sweetish, strong smelling stuff. He put in the cork again. The baby would not awaken, and would be buried somewhere in the thick woods, and no one would go near it again. After that he would take Ameou away with him towards civilization, and show those lawyers the short will, and also the marriage lines Father Gregoire had written out for Loveland and the girl. Then there would be a lot of delay with probates and things wherewith lawyers ever bothered people, but finally everything would come out all right.

But again his mind was troubled by the thought of Mashkaugan. Once or twice, since the half-breed's return, he had sought to exercise authority, had hinted at the power he held over the man, but this appeared to have lost its effect. Sometimes, in anger, Curran had felt that he would like to thrash the fellow within an inch of his life, but there was something about the hunchback's

heavy frame, a power in his long hairy arms, an air of brutish ferocity in his eyes, that would have made such an assault a perilous undertaking. And so he had swallowed his anger when the man told him to go to the devil, refused to do his bidding, or treated him as an equal, as a partner in crime.

One of the great penalties suffered by the man whose security depends on secrecy, on a faith kept by others of equally evil mind, is the fact that he knows in his heart that there is no honor among thieves. Ready as he is to betray others, he feels that hands may be suddenly lifted against him, to his undoing.

"He can't ever prove anything against me. My word is as good as his. He's an escaped convict while I'm a man in a position of trust and responsibility. I'll put a bullet through him if he turns against me. Wonder what the deuce he's up to?"

Thus Curran cogitated, uneasily, unable to see the trend of things but realizing that, in some way, there were strange influences at work against him. Through his mind ran something that was

obsessing. He knew not what it was and yet he was restless, expectant, scenting peril. One who aches from the effects of a blow seldom suffers as much as the man who sees it coming, who dreads it, who awaits it in a fever of apprehension. The agent, when he could quietly and coldly consider the situation, felt that everything was safe, that no harm would come, that his plans must go through without hindrance. And yet agitated periods would return, during which an unreasoned fear would possess him. His nails would dig hard into the palms of his hands, his pupils would contract and his nerves be on edge, so that unexpected noises or the sudden presence of a man beside him would cause him to start.

He gritted his teeth and went down to the shore. A man called Akitamek asked him if he were needed, and Curran roughly refused his help, after which he entered his canoe and started, northward, on his way to Many Beaver Lake.

CHAPTER XIV

MASHKAUGAN'S TERROR

In the meantime the lightly laden canoe bearing Ameou and Mashkaugan had made great speed down the river, racing along with desperate energy.

The long and knotted ape-like arms of the hunchback rose from the water like the pistons of an engine and swept backward with a force to which the frail craft responded like a horse feeling the lash.

The young woman toiled with a nervous energy that might soon exhaust her; it was probably better for her to expend some of the fierceness of her despair in this manner than in a harassing anguish of mind. So long as she kept on, breathing hard, calling upon her strength for every bit of power it could possibly give out, she suffered less from her torturing fear.

But if any one had sought to discover from

Mashkaugan what his purpose was in accompanying the young mother he might have found it hardly possible to give an answer. He probably did not know himself, having acted under the impulse of some instinct, some well-nigh unconscious reflex which he obeyed blindly. At the bottom of it all, in all probability, there lay an unexpressed and vague desire to make some small atonement for the foul deed which was torturing his conscience, an unconscious realization of all the harm he had done.

At this moment, at any rate, he only thought of his quest. While his paddle never rested for an instant his head constantly turned from side to side, keenly noting every stick and stone, every shrub and branch, every track of muskrat on the bank of the river. He could only with difficulty spell out the words of men, or scratch his name upon paper, but the book of the wilderness was clear and open to him.

After nearly an hour of such hard going, during which not a word had passed between the two, they finally reached the wide and shallow place where the currents of the greater and smaller

river mingle, on their way to Hudson's Bay. At this moment, for the first time, Ameou turned and looked inquiringly at Mashkaugan, showing him a haggard face and eyes that were beginning to dull under the intensity of her suffering, and the man let his paddle rest.

"Ituaganu of the scarred face belongs to the Itushpi country, the land of Alders, wherefore he would travel down the main river. But here there is thirty miles of dead water; his canoe is heavy with the winter's provisions and he paddles alone. Therefore if swift going canoes started after him soon he would be caught. But from Many Beavers there is a small stream that rejoins the bigger river, close to the rapids, and it is a good place in which to hide, with many bogs and little running waters. We go to Many Beavers."

Then an awful fatigue came upon the young woman, and for a time she was compelled to stop plying her paddle, but Mashkaugan kept on, seemingly unwearied, as if there were cords of steel within his great twisted body instead of the flesh and sinews of a man. But he had not gone

very far before Ameou's strength returned, or perhaps the mere savageness of her energy, and she began to toil once more and the canoe traveled swiftly again, though making slower advance, for they were now facing the current coming from the lake.

Finally they reached the outlet of Many Beaver.

"*Petshikatshish!* Go slowly!" the man told her.

Ameou again stopped paddling. She knew that this meant they must carefully investigate the shores of the lake. Mashkaugan was standing up, looking about him, over the water and along the shore. Nearly at the other end of the small lake a thin film of smoke was arising, very straight in the air.

"It is the fire of the man called Atuk," said the half-breed. "He is camped on this lake during the run of the whitefish; it is a good place for the netting. After we look over the east shore we will go on to his camp; perhaps he may have seen some sign of Scarface, though it was probably dark when he reached the lake. The camp is at

the place where big rocks drop sheer into deep water."

But Ameou was hardly listening. Nothing seemed to matter to her but to keep on moving and hunting for her child. Her paddle lay inboard, for Mashkaugan was no longer hurrying. Twice he drove the canoe ashore and looked at faint marks on the edge, giving a mere swift glance.

"*Mitsheshu!* A fox!" he said the first time, pushing off again, but at the next stopped just a little longer.

"One man been here," he grunted again. "Not Scarface. Small dead-fall for mink over there. It was Atuk!"

And so they kept on until they reached a place where the water was shoal, with many of the big yellow water-lilies, and a few of the smaller-leafed white ones, among which fish were leaping. For a good many yards out from the shore grew reeds, thickly, a good place for the nesting of ducks in the spring, or for great pike to lurk with big glassy eyes intent on the passing of whitefish.

"*Eukun!* It is here," exclaimed the hunchback, speaking excitedly for the first time and

looking like a hound, with nose uplifted, who has scented game. The corners of his eyes were wrinkled, the undershot lower jaw protruded farther.

He had suddenly dug his paddle in the water, stopping the canoe's headway, and was peering intently. The man's eyes had at once detected the bending over of some of the reeds which, however, showed less trace of disturbance than if a mouse or caribou had been treading them down.

"Canoe been in and then out again," he commented, and Ameou nodded, her eyes glistening and her breath coming fast, for to her the signs had also been most plainly written. It was something that the veriest child of her tribe would have noted.

Using his paddle as a pole Mashkaugan pushed his canoe ashore, following the trail of bent grasses, and soon they were touching the shallow black oozy bottom. A strong shove forced the bow along the side of a big fallen birch upon which they stepped out to land. Before them, most plainly marked on the soft, mossy ground,

was the double track of a man going and returning.

"Ituaganu," said Mashkaugan, quietly, biting a piece from a plug of tobacco. "He came and did not remain, but we must see."

Ameou seized the rifle and together they followed the plain trail for about a hundred paces. Upon a wide bed of thick moss there was a faint depression in the soft surface, as if some weight had lain upon it for some time, but nothing else.

"Now who was the other man?" asked Mashkaugan.

"What other man?" asked Ameou, startled. She had been looking farther into the wood, whereas her companion had been staring at the ground at his feet, carefully, intent upon the solution of a new mystery.

"Another man came here, but it was after Scarface had gone. Look at these tracks, they overlie the others, in some places. The man bore a load, for the print is deep, and his shoepacks were badly torn. Look at this mark in the soft mud. And this man certainly took away that which was

lying on the moss. His trail we must now follow also."

And so they started again, hurriedly, for the marks were plain as day, but they had gone a few yards only before Mashkaugan stopped again, scratching his head, in evident wonder.

"Surely I have been mistaken," he said. "Indeed I thought this man had come after Scarface, for the signs were clear. Yet now it looks as if they must have met, and as if Ituaganu had given him strong drink, in plenty.

"Look well for thyself, Ameou, and thou wilt see that he walks like a drunken man, swaying from side to side. And here is a big flat stone, handy for a man to put his foot upon, and yet at its side is a track in the deep mud, and it shows the man saw not where he was going. Also here is another sign that the man must have been drunk, for he has fallen on his knees and arisen again, with also the sinking of one hand deep in the black muck."

It so happened, of course, that in this conclusion Mashkaugan was badly in error, but it must be said that no follower of trails, however shrewd,

could have made a better guess from the marks so deeply imprinted before him, from the swaying and weaving of the gait that seemed to point so clearly to the walking of a man helpless with drink.

They kept on, for a short distance until they were delayed by a large expanse of flat table-rock, upon which the trail was utterly lost, but the check was only a temporary one, for Mashkaugan cast around the edges, carefully, and in another moment he had discovered the tracks again and had called Ameou, who had sunk wearily on the ground while he was searching. But she arose at once, eagerly, for the inaction was more killing than the efforts she could make. As long as she could go on there was no fatigue, no distress whatever of the body, only the huge longing to go forward, to discover something that might lead her to her child.

"See again how drunken this man must have been," said Mashkaugan, "for here we have come to a blazed trail that runs near the shore of the lake. An old marten set lies here. See where the stump is where have been piled boughs to

keep snow from the trap, and the cut sticks that made the hut. A regular path it is, as easily followed as the bed of a stream, and yet this man walks just one step to the side of it, tearing through alders and sinking in deep mud, because he is too blinded with drink to know a clear trail. What is there but the burning water that would make a man behave in such manner? Surely we will find him soon, lying at the foot of some tree and sleeping off the drink. Come on!"

As they went on they noted other details of this strange, staggering walk, but suddenly Mashkaugan stopped and peered ahead, like a hunter who sees distant game and stops to consider the best way of getting within shot of it, studying the direction of wind and the nature of the ground, in order to escape the scenting or clear vision of his prey.

"Wait thou here for a moment," he told the young woman, who sank again to the ground, exhausted, after which he hurried on, swiftly, making not the slightest sound, excited as if indeed some great quarry lay before him. He knew that by this time he must be very near the fish-

ing camp of Atuk, where the provision was being made for the winter, but that which he saw was strange, and he could not understand it.

It was an uncanny form of a man who was sitting upon a log and whose head had sunk upon his chest, in an odd manner. His whole body seemed collapsed in a hopeless misery, like that of some very helpless man of extreme old age, perhaps abandoned in the big wood to die, in the manner related by traditions telling how, in olden times of famine, the Indians were sometimes compelled to leave behind those who could no longer go on and whom they were unable to feed.

There could certainly be no danger in approaching such a man, nor could he, in his feebleness, have escaped pursuit, and yet the hunchback went on, strangely timid, scenting some curious mystery, acting as if he had been in the presence of some evil, unhallowed being that could suddenly rise in vengeful anger.

By this time, a short distance away, Mashkaugan could see Atuk's tent, and the fish hanging from poles, but there was no other sign of life, saving the smoke that arose faintly from a dying

fire. Finally, abandoning his stealthy, crouching walk, the hunchback took courage to rise. He put out his hand and touched this man, who faced the other way and seemed like a being of mystery who had awakened his superstitious fears.

Slowly, painfully, the form moved, the head turned towards him—and Mashkaugan beheld a face that was a wild caricature of the one he had last seen upturned to him in the crashing floods of the Great White Rapids!

With a gasping shriek of horror Mashkaugan turned and fled, crashing through shrubs and underbrush like a defeated bull of moose fleeing from a rival's deadly antlers. A moment later he had reached Ameou, who had risen to her feet when she had heard his terrible cry, and seized her by the arm.

"Come!" he bellowed hoarsely. "This is a place where curses fall on men—where maledictions overtake them. Let us fly!"

The man was wild with his terror, shaking all over, his face ghastly with an earthy hue that had suddenly come over it. Ameou's overwrought nerves were affected by his panic, and instinc-

Slowly, painfully, the form moved, the head turned towards him.

tively, unreasoningly, they both fled in consternation toward the canoe.

When they reached it, panting and shaken, they threw themselves in it and shoved off, the man pushing savagely through the reeds and beginning to paddle as if the evil spirits of the whole world had been pursuing them.

With chattering teeth the hunchback dug in the water, with tremendous sweeps in which went the whole power of his great shoulders and sturdy loins, his scared face turning as he looked back, from time to time. Ameou, for a time, also bent every effort to help him, but she was the first to recover from her emotion, understanding no reason for all this fear. She stopped paddling and turned to Mashkaugan, who sat in the stern.

"But surely my child must have been there," she sobbed. "Stop—stop at once and return, or let me go ashore and I will go alone, if thou art afraid! What are spirits of evils or devils to me? I would fight with them for my little *ouash*, for my little Yellow Hair!"

But the man was heedless of her protests, and kept up his wild paddling.

"I tell thee it is a place where the dead are waiting to take the living by the throat and strangle them," he shrieked at her. "Nothing is there but the dead and the spirits of the dead and a deserted tent whence the people have fled, unless they have been slain! If thy child was there he was also surely dead!"

Heedless of her protests he continued to paddle, the dark veins standing out like swollen cords upon his sweating brow and the madness of a deadly fear gleaming in his eyes.

This was more than the poor woman could stand. Her torture had lasted too long—it had been too great for her to bear and her power had been tried beyond endurance. Slowly she sank down unconscious, in the bottom of the canoe, while it kept on racing, impelled by those furious strokes that were taking her farther and farther from the two beings on earth for whom her poor soul was hungering. The trees and the rocks seemed to rush by; they shot down rapid places, the water boiling at their sides, the rockheads looking up threateningly, and reached smoother waters, without a moment's halting, with never a

thought in the man's brain but to make good his escape, until presently he saw a canoe, at the confluence of the two rivers, and recognized Curran, who was paddling alone. But when they approached one another Mashkaugan never stopped. As the canoe went furiously by Curran saw that Ameou was lying at the bottom, and he grinned, highly pleased.

It was evident that they had failed to find the child, and that now he would bring it back in triumph. Encouraged by this thought he plied his blade faster, and soon the others were out of sight.

CHAPTER XV

FROM RAGING WATERS

The load taken from Curran's mind was a great one. The hunchback had hardly looked at him, and the senseless form of the woman who was lying in the bottom of the canoe gave conclusive evidence that their search had been unsuccessful and that they were returning empty-handed and defeated from their search.

The chief agent of Tshemuak Post grinned again in evil fashion. Everything was turning out beautifully. The disappointment and the grief Ameou was suffering, increased by her useless trip, would make her more grateful than ever for the return of the child. Now he could take his own time and quietly go over and pick up that baby. It was doubtless all right, though perhaps mighty hungry, but a half-breed brat couldn't be starved to death in less than a day, he was sure. After he brought it back Ameou, in her gratitude,

would fall in his arms, tearfully, and doubtless make little objection to his urgings.

He kept on, paddling strongly, for he was a powerful man, and reached Many Beaver Lake. From the outlet, less than a mile away he could see the fallen birch Scarface had spoken of, and pointed his canoe straight towards it.

The wind, that had been very still in the morning, so that the air felt warm and the perspiration had come freely with exertion, was beginning to blow in strong gusts, and he had to do some fairly hard work before he could reach the place. His eye was also attracted by Atuk's camp, just visible among the trees, but it was of no concern to him. Finally he reached the spot where the bent reeds showed that a passage had been made through them and followed it to the shore, where he pulled up the bow of his canoe.

As soon as he jumped out, however, he stopped, badly perplexed. The place was all tracked over in the most puzzling way, and it was quite evident that two canoes had been ashore. He was no such woodsman and hunter as Mashkaugan, and indications that might have been plain to the

latter were a mystery to him. However, there was a plain trail leading into the woods, also trodden by many feet, and he followed it, wondering, until he reached the place where the child had been abandoned.

"What infernal mess is this," he asked himself, angrily, feeling utterly unable to solve the enigma.

He readily saw the tracks going further away and followed them till they all disappeared on a wide expanse of table rock. Here he was utterly at fault and, lacking Mashkaugan's ability as a tracker, was finally compelled to desist from his search, thoroughly unable to solve the enigma. It was most evident that something had gone wrong and his first impulse, naturally enough, was to believe that in some way Scarface had betrayed him and served him some scurrilous trick. Its nature and purpose, however, utterly escaped him. He could only rage at the man and plan some manner of awful punishment that would be meted out to him, sooner or later. Finally another idea came to him.

"Like as not Mashkaugan and the girl overtook him, or saw him coming out of the reeds. Then

they went in, of course, and got the kid. But then I've been fooling myself, and he was in the canoe all the time, perhaps stuck in the bow where I couldn't see. Of course it couldn't be dead, unless that idiot Scarface—but no, he wouldn't do that. I told him not to harm it. Wonder if maybe some wild animal—"

This thought troubled him exceedingly. As a matter of fact he had not the slightest objection to the child's dying; on the contrary. But the proper time hadn't come for that. If it was dead the girl would rage and carry on, and would no more marry him than she would have thrown the baby in the lake, when it was alive. He knew she had no particular liking for him, and that she had a mind of her own. If she grew obstinate the old chief and his wife wouldn't make her budge an inch. And then, supposing they had been in time to intercept Ituaganu, and Mashkaugan had taken hold of the chap, the half-breed might have beaten or cajoled the truth out of him. If this had happened there were pretty good chances for that knife to be planted in his back, for these infernal Indians were poor hands at taking a joke.

For a time he sat down, even trying to smoke, but his pipe went out after the first few puffs and he finally rose, irresolutely, and made his way back to the canoe. Hang it! He couldn't stay there! He was compelled to go back! As he started away again, after pushing out of the reeds, cursing to himself, he found that the wind had so increased that he was obliged to pay a great deal of attention to the waves that were ready to break over his craft, showering him at times with spray. But finally he reached the outlet, and once on the river there was no more danger from the wind, since it could raise no great commotion in shallow waters. He paddled homeward, greatly disturbed in mind. He had so greatly depended on the effect that would be produced by his triumphal return with the baby that now he felt like a whipped cur, and a fear came to him that was mingled with bitter anger. Mashkaugan's going with Ameou, he felt certain, had been the real cause of the failure of his plans, and Curran, at well-nigh every stroke of his paddle, cursed him malignantly.

Early in the afternoon he was in sight of Tshemuak Post again, and did his best to put on an appearance of boldness and confidence. He got out of his canoe and went directly up to old Nimissuts, who was warming his shins in front of a fire before his tent.

"Is the child found?" he asked, eagerly. "I have searched high and low but could find no sign of it!"

But the old man took his pipe out of his mouth and shook his head, dolefully.

"The *ouash* is utterly lost," he said, looking greatly troubled; "some of the other men who went out have returned, having found no sign of the baby. Up the river they went, beyond the third rapids from here, and saw nothing. Two men have gone even farther, but the men here think it useless, nor do they believe that Scarface will be caught below, although the canoe that has gone all the way to the end of the long dead water might bring news. They will not return for many hours. As for me, I know not what to think. It is very bad, and my daughter is as a

woman crazed, and the others are with her, weeping, and if Scarface ever returns to this country—but it is better not to talk."

A few Indians had come and gathered around them. Curran was greatly relieved that the child had not been brought back, and especially that there was no certainty that he was dead. He thought of a way of perhaps obtaining some gratitude from Ameou.

"Ye must all seek again!" he shouted. "You have not been far enough. You must look down river, for that is the way Scarface would go, and in Many Beaver. Search until you find him. Each man who goes will be given of tea a couple of pounds, and a plug of tobacco, and to the man who finds the baby I will give one hundred dollars—which is two hundred skins by the old reckoning. Ay, that I will give, freely, to the man who brings back the *ouash* to the poor suffering daughter of Nimissuts! See that ye all hunt until it is found again!"

In justice to the Indians it must be said that every one had searched to the very best of his ability. Yet the proffered tea and tobacco, and

the possibility of obtaining such a great reward, started most of them off again. Some sallied forth through the woods, carrying guns on their shoulders, but most, taking some provisions with them, paddled off again to the northward.

From her tent Ameou had come out and stood there, so broken in body and mind that she was a pitiful sight, with her beautiful eyes all black and haggard, her frame loosened so that she seemed ready to fall, her hands feverish and shaking. Yet she was grateful to Curran for his offer to the Indians. She put out her hand, weakly, and the man instantly grasped it while she thanked him in a low, sobbing voice, that would have brought pity to any other man's heart.

He stood up, looking mighty important, and patted her shoulder as if she had been a small child. Nor did she resent this at all, probably being quite unconscious of it. What mattered it what men did, or what they said, now that all that she treasured in the world had been taken away from her? She clutched, like a drowning man, at every straw of hope that passed within her reach, but nothing else was of any moment.

"Now don't despair," Curran was saying. "At any moment some of these men may return with thy little *ouash*, with the son of my poor friend that has met his death. There surely is much hope yet, for if Scarface has taken the child he would not harm it, and doubtless meant to play some trick. Indeed I will mete him terrible punishment for it unless he himself brings the child back, as he most likely will before long. Do not weep thus. Indeed thou wilt see the baby again."

He was none too sure of that which he advanced, for he feared that something had occurred to the child, but he knew the girl would be grateful for his words. He was a good actor, playing his part with consummate skill. His voice had expressed the deepest sympathy. While none of the Indians had ever liked him, many of them, in spite of the fact that they were fairly shrewd, had become impressed in his favor, and told one another that the man must be right, that his talk was straight.

But suddenly they were interrupted. Mashkaugan had also come near and was listening.

Suddenly the man burst out into a short, rasping laugh that sounded uncanny, causing a chill to run down the agent's back.

Curran at once turned upon him, savagely, thinking that once again a warning look, a hand upheld that would hold a threat, might quiet the man and cause him to slink away, as he used to in other days, but he met such heinous and staring eyes, before which his own, in spite of all efforts, gave way and fell to the ground, that he remained helpless and silent. Then Mashkaugan turned quietly away and Curran, much disturbed, returned to the post building where, with a shaking hand that spilled some of the liquor, he poured out a stiff drink from his bottle.

When he thought again of Mashkaugan, after his nerves had steadied for a time under the influence of his dram, a look of cold blood-thirstiness came to the man's features. If the hunchback was a source of peril it became a question of one of their lives. He would not hesitate. Unless the man was becoming absolutely insane there was no danger that he would speak of the killing

of Loveland, for he could not do so without admitting that he was the one who had pushed the man into the White Rapids.

And yet the half-breed might be at the beginning of madness, and then, of course, there was no saying what he might do. Luckily there was no proof by which the agent might be held for the crime; not a written word nor a witness of any sort. If the man was crazy no one would believe him and he would be shut up in some asylum for his kind.

But he was not near civilization. Crazy though he might be the Indians might believe him. As a matter of fact they deemed the mentally afflicted as people singled out by spirits, and it would take little to make them believe that these perhaps spoke truthfully through him. And then the idea of revenge would come. Had Loveland not been the husband of one of their own women, they would have regarded themselves as unconcerned by anything that might have happened to him. But now he had been accepted by the tribe as one of their own, and there was always that woman, that girl Ameou, tall, glorious in beauty

and in strength, and probably a devil incarnate if she but suspected the truth.

So quickly did all these things pass through his mind that in a few minutes he was the prey of a score of emotions, uncertain, conflicting, but all holding the threat of some peril, and the sweat came to his forehead while he shivered with vague apprehension.

While such disturbing thoughts were sorely troubling the agent's mind and causing him again to resort to his fiery drink, Mashkaugan had returned to his shack, where he sat upon his bunk, on a ragged blanket that was no longer good enough for traveling, and also became the prey of appalling emotions.

Even those Indians of the north who have come under the influence of the missionaries, and outwardly follow all their teachings, have never been able to put aside entirely traces of the ancient beliefs. With a great many it is far more than a trace. Never can they help feeling that there are spirits in the plumed and waving grasses of the openings in the forest, or dwelling in the trunks of great trees, in the waters that seem things of

life, in the mountains about whose tops the forked lightning plays, in the very rocks against which the floods rage, helplessly. To them the great crashing voice of thunder holds a meaning, understood of the gods only. The sun and moon and stars are guided in their course by supernatural powers; the fishes and fowls and all four-footed things harbor spirits, of which some may be good but most must certainly be evil.

Mashkaugan, made silent and somber all his life by his deformity, that turned women away from him and made him an object of pity or scorn to many men, shunned also by many on account of his reputation for doubtful honesty, was indeed inclined to such beliefs. Never had he known his father. His mother he only remembered as a fine, big woman who had passed away before his accident. For many years he had lived altogether with Indians, or alone, trapping, hunting, and gradually engaging in risky enterprises such as the law frowned upon. The loneliness of most of his existence and its hardships had doubtless fostered in him the superstitions in which he had come to believe.

Hitherto he had been guilty only of illegal dealings. These had left him as calm as any animal would be whose conduct is only the following of an inborn instinct. But the punishment had seemed too hard, too inhuman. In the confinement of the prison the man of the great open spaces suffers more than does the dweller in towns. He had escaped, risking his life without thought. He had been free, and the fear of being taken again had made him a slave to Curran. But nothing he had ever done really seemed wrong to him. Great may be the punishment for a wrong stroke of the paddle, for an incautious step upon a rolling stone. His breaches of the laws seemed of no greater importance than these. He had merely taken chances.

But the agent's empire over him had become very great, so great that once his fears were played upon, once he thought himself in danger, he had become a shrewd and vengeful beast of prey. And then, with much caution, with infinite cunning, he had killed a man—and now this man's face, last seen in the raging flood, returned to obsess him, in the day and in the night. When it

disturbed him in his dreams he would awaken covered with cold sweat and trembling, for he had not merely aroused the wrath of men but the vengeance of a myriad gods of the wilderness.

He could not get rid of it. In the deep woods he saw it, ghastly and terrifying, and he was helpless before it. Gradually a fierce resentment toward the man who had placed him in this plight had come to him. It was his fault alone. Never would he have done this deed had he not been tempted, frightened, threatened, again and again.

"Now I am surely doomed to some terrible punishment," he told himself. "It is coming and there is no escape from it. No man can suffer as I do unless spirits of evil are ever about him and torturing him always. And it will go on until the end."

The man looked about him as if he were actually feeling the presence of some fiend hidden in his shack, or hovering around it, who might at any time rend his limbs asunder with claw and fang.

It was at this moment that an idea came to him that if he could in any way make retribution this

might lessen his punishment by softening the wrath of the *windegos*. He had killed the father; now he would seek to save the son. With head held in the grasp of his hands he cogitated over this, thinking rapidly.

"The *ouash* was certainly taken to Many Beaver Lake. It was put down under the tree. Scarface was there. The child must be there, but whether living or dead I do not know. I shall go again and find it. There was no track of bear or wolf or lynx that could have carried it away and therefore it is sure that the man who walked drunkenly took it away with him. This man may also be dead, having fallen somewhere with the child, or having been slain by the spirits. And the ghost of the child's father was watching near at hand, close to his son. Yet I will go there again, and if any devil comes after me, seeking my life, it is better to die at once than be racked as I am now. Therefore I will go. If I do not die I will find the little child, or perhaps its body, and I will bring it back. And it may yet be living, for spirits do not only watch the dead. Then perhaps the gladness of the woman Ameou, when

I bring her little one to her, may do something towards making those fiends more merciful to me."

At once the hunchback rushed to his canoe, determined to face all dangers rather than prolong the agony of his mind. Curran called to him, from the post building, and came running down, but Mashkaugan paid no heed to him and, a moment later, was rapidly going down the river. He had gone but a mile or so when he met some men returning, who told him they had gone all the way down the long dead water, but had found nothing, not even a trace at the rapids or on the portage. They said they were discouraged, that it was no use to search any longer, for it was now utterly useless.

"Where the river comes in from Many Beaver," said one of them, "we smelled smoke coming from the northeast, on this strong wind that is blowing now. It is from the place where Atuk is drying fish, but being weary we did not go there since Ameou and thou went there this morning early and could find nothing."

Mashkaugan only grinned and went on his way, much encouraged, since if smoke had been

smelled it showed that Atuk was still living, and that the reason why the camp looked deserted was because he and his wife were off, back of the rocks, tending their nets. He reflected that if he had only gone on, that morning, and made search for these people, instead of flying away in terror, he might have heard something from them.

But the sight of that face had been so unexpected, so terrifying, that he had thought only of escape. Now that he was prepared he would not fear it so greatly. Now that he thought of it, it had not looked at him vengefully or angrily. Therefore he would go all the way by water, and call out, and Atuk would appear, and then he would go ashore in safety, and ask questions, perhaps thus learning something.

He forced his canoe ahead, paddling with every bit of his power, but the strong wind hindered a great deal for a canoe is an ill thing for a man to paddle alone in a gale, even in smooth water. But when he entered the other river the right bank of the stream, thickly grown with alders and birches, gave him a great deal of protection from the wind and he continued to travel fast so that

another hour of strong paddling brought him once more to the outlet of Many Beaver Lake, where the constantly increasing wind was lashing the surface in great white-caps.

Now it is certain that by every rule of prudent conduct Mashkaugan should have left his canoe there and taken to the shore, going on foot. There is also no doubt that if he had been entirely in his right mind he would have done so, for he was too excellent a *voyageur* to take stupid risks. Yet he never hesitated for a moment, driving his canoe into the breaking waves.

There must have been in the man some strange spirit of exultation or defiance. It is possible that he considered that death could not come to him in the waters of the lake until after he had finished the work he had undertaken, or that he felt that if it had been decreed for him by the *windegos*, such an end to their vengeance would be more swift and merciful than the torments they had already inflicted upon him. The mere fact that he could not swim made him very certain of this.

It may seem strange that very few of the canoe

Indians of the north, living as they do on the water, are able to swim even a few strokes, and yet it is readily explained. The long winters, of course, prevent any bathing, since the waters are locked in ice, while in the summer most of the waters are too rapid and the lakes are icy cold, many never rising above fifty degrees even in the heat of summer, owing to their depth and the cold springs running into them. The man, moreover, who does his best to hang on to his canoe has always a much better chance than the one who seeks to swim to safety, whereas the swimmer has hardly any. He is nearly always dashed against the rocks or swiftly paralyzed by the cold.

We may admit that it was an insane thing for any man to push out among the short and choppy waves whose foam-crowned heads were being swept of spume by the howling wind, and it is most probable that the man's mind was affected, but it is unlikely that any other man could have battled against them as Mashkaugan did that day. The power that he put into his strokes as he met the billows was uncanny, something heroic which the men of that country are still talking about.

To start at all had been utter folly, of course, but once he found himself in the turmoil the conflict became a tremendous thing, the grandiose showing of a man endowed, perhaps only for a short time, with superhuman strength.

He was weak and helpless against his fear of devils. It could easily overcome him; but in the presence of actual, awful danger he had become utterly dauntless, his face brightening with the lust of combat. His cap had been blown from his head and his long black hair, rough and uncared for, stood out like some strange plume of warriors. The frail craft met the waves and rose above them, standing on its stern and then rushing bow on into the next trough as if intent on burying itself for ever. Yet it rose again and again, guided by the most wondrous skill, by something amounting to a sort of genius, and steadied by the man's amazing strength, who seemed to joy in the battle.

But soon, in spite of astounding ability, the forces he was meeting became too powerful even for him to contend against. At best a canoe is a poor craft in angry water. The curling tops,

from time to time, began to rise just a little over the gunwales, just splashing in a little water, at first, and then more. The spray from the broken tops of seas hailed down upon him, like a fierce downpour, and there was no possibility of bailing out.

Then the canoe began to rise more and more sluggishly and to fall with heavier thuds, trembling all over like some wounded beast, refusing to give quick answer to the swift and mighty strokes of its occupant, who seemed unconscious of his peril.

Although he was nearing the other shore, Mashkaugan began to realize that only by a miracle could he win the battle, and yet he laughed aloud, his voice drowned by the gale, and showed no sign of despair. Death in open conflict was something he had never dreaded; it was the proper ending of a man, a great, joyous, lustful thing to affront.

As the moment of defeat came nearer and nearer the deeply sunken eyes were gleaming with the terrific passion of strife and the man looked ahead, bearing an air of defiance such as his savage

ancestors would surely have shown when tied to the stake and awaiting torture. Pure bravery it was, or madness, or a joyful abandonment of a life that had been a harsh and troubled one, but in its essence it bore an element of nobility and greatness.

Through the flying spume he could see the shore coming nearer to him. Every wave he met seemed to be about to overwhelm him at last, and yet, in spite of the water-logged canoe, he kept on forging closer and closer, until the distance became a very short one.

Then a tremendous wave caught the side of his bow, and for a terrible moment he was in the trough of the waves. For a second the boat was righted, by the fiercest effort, but by this time it was nearly full of water.

Once more he cast his eyes upon the shore in order to measure the remaining distance. It was steep, the water deep to its very edge of rocky boulders and cliff, and suddenly he saw, standing among the rocks, the same terrifying figure that had appalled him in the morning.

This great unkempt thing that looked like a

mocking imitation of the man he had thrust into the seething rapids opened its mouth and shouted, but Mashkaugan heard nothing in the roar of the breaking seas.

"This is the coming of death," said Mashkaugan.

Then the man cast away his useless paddle. Crossing his great arms upon his chest he awaited the coming of his fate.

The next wave swept over the frail craft. It sank deeply, only to come up again, rolling like a log upon the water. For a moment Mashkaugan had caught the edge of the canoe, but it was torn from his grasp and he went down—down, ever so far. He came up again, fighting blindly, pushing out his arms and was tossed further from the shore by the next billow. Once more he strangled under the surface and a fierce roaring came in his ears, while he only made futile efforts to save himself.

The man who had stood on the rock cast himself in the water. He spent the little strength that had returned to him, struggling with the waves, and in a few seconds more his right hand

reached some part of the hunchback's coat. He grasped it and fought again to return to shore, whither wind and wave was pushing him.

Two or three strokes only were needed. The two were uplifted by a wave and rolled upon a flat boulder.

Atuk, the Nascaupee, rushed out upon it and dragged out Mashkaugan's limp form, till the man's head was out of reach of the waves, and returned to help Loveland, who was feebly struggling to get on his feet.

CHAPTER XVI

FLESH AND BLOOD

For a time it is necessary for us to return to the arrival of Loveland to the fishing-camp of Atuk and his wife, who had done all that lay in their power to help him and take care of him.

There is surely no part of the world where the good Samaritan has not been found. The touching parable is one that shall endure for all time, for the trait of human kindness and charity has been found in all places between the ends of the earth. The two Nascaupees, savages merely touched by the outer fringe of civilization, proved worthy followers of the great example. They were well acquainted, as all dwellers of the northern wilds must unfortunately be, with the pitiful signs of over-exertion combined with hunger and cold.

Both of them toiled over Loveland for a long time before they actually recognized him. His

hair, that had been allowed to grow for some three months, and now tangled and soiled, the beard he had hitherto never worn, the haggard and hollow face, were sufficient to conceal his identity, together with the rags that now served him for clothing, of which he had left shreds upon tangles of thorn and vine in a thousand places.

As so often happens it was the woman's quicker intuition which first revealed the truth to her. Her husband had thought only of immediate needs; the wife, added to this, possessed feminine curiosity. After she had fed the little child, which also had seemed to be perishing with hunger, but which was fat and well-cared for as to garments, and had laid it down on soft skins by the side of her own baby, she looked at the man intently, and suddenly she knew.

"It is none other than Uapishiu of the Golden Hair, the man they call Loveland also!" she exclaimed, excitedly.

"What sayest thou! Indeed, as I look at him I think thou art not mistaken," assented Atuk. "But how is this? Did we not hear at Tshemuak that Yellow Hair had perished in the great White

Rapids, and did we not also hear that Mashkaugan returned alone, telling of the death, and that the young woman Ameou was grieving for it? And yet it surely is Uapishiu and no other man."

"Then I am glad she need grieve no longer," cried the woman. "The man they all thought dead has returned, having done a wonderful thing. Does he not bear all the marks of a terrible journey?"

The man also looked at Loveland in wonder. He was well fitted to judge all that the man had been through. It was nearly unbelievable. They undressed him, finding a body that was covered with bruises from the falls due to his weakness while the skin was torn all over by branches and thorns that had sought to hold him back.

"His is indeed like the pelt of a bull of caribou after he has had many fights over the does," said Atuk.

They dressed the wounds with balsam which they collected in a birch-bark cup held beneath the blisters on the trunks of fir-trees, on which every little swelling that is punctured drops a

few tears of crystal-clear resin. After this they began to knead his limbs gently and persistently, while he continued to sleep like a man who would never be aroused. At frequent intervals they poured a little strong broth of meat or fish in his mouth, or some strong tea which he swallowed half-unconsciously.

At first he seemed to obey, mechanically, with hardly any sign that he understood what was being done, like some blind pup bereft of its mother and fed with a spoon, but after a short time he began to push away the kindly hands, desiring nothing but to be allowed to fall again into a slumber that was deep as the stillness of death and perhaps more healing than all the power of the medicine-men. And so they left him in peace, until shortly after noon, when he had slept for three hours steadily; then they roused him again.

"He has never been utterly without food," said Atuk. "In his pack there is still a little flour, though it is damp and getting mouldy, but nothing else to eat. Also it is not the lack of sleep he suffers from. A man must rest at night, when he cannot travel. The toil of the journey has been

more terrible than the hunger. It will be well to make him eat again, a little at a time, for then the food will not bring on the cramps and vomiting that come to those who have starved too long."

They had wrapped him up in warm blankets, heavy ones bought from the company, and carried him out near the fire at the entrance of the tent; but his head still lolled upon his breast, feebly, for the only desire that overwhelmed him was for sleep.

Yet now when they gave him more food he swallowed greedily and the longing for rest gradually subsided before the call of his clamoring stomach. Indeed, he would probably have eaten more at this time than would have been good for him, but the Indians withheld it from him, obstinately, and laid him in front of the fire upon which burned brightly great logs of birch and big pieces of jack-pine that gave forth bright flames.

"Now we will let the heat enter his body," said Atuk. "It will drive away the chill of the long cold nights and of the sweaty skin that is struck by icy wind and rain. His heart beats stronger and he breathes well. The woman Ameou shall see

her man living, and a few weeks will bring strength to him, have no fear!"

And so Loveland slept again and his overdriven heart began to beat more strongly and evenly, while the sickly, muddy tan of his face began to show slight signs of an undercurrent of red blood, which was driving strength and nourishment through the exhausted body.

"He is a great and sturdy man," said Atuk. "That which he has done is a thing to marvel at. The children of our children will speak of it, and in canoes traveling to Mukumeshu men will point out the terrible places he had to journey over."

Two hours later they awoke him again, mercilessly, but when he was finally roused he spoke again, showing command over himself, thanking them gratefully while he ate again and tried to move his stiffened joints, which Atuk kneaded for him. He sat up by the fire, holding up his head, and it was at this time that Atuk's wife began to ask questions that had mightily worried and vexed her motherly soul, since there was an amazing mystery about some things. This starved man had come to them—by no means a

very amazing circumstance—and they had cared for him as the great majority of Indians of the north would have done; but the matter of the baby was a bewildering problem.

"Thou art Uapishiu Yellow Hair," she said, eagerly. "I knew it very soon, when thy cap fell off and we could see the color of thy locks. Indeed we are glad that thou art come, saved after it was thought that thou wert dead. But tell me how it comes that the little one is with thee—and where is his mother?"

"The little one!" Loveland echoed in surprise. "I know nothing of a little one."

"What art thou saying? The little *ouash* was in thy arms as thou camest here—and as he also seemed to be perishing with hunger I put him to my breast. He was most greedy; a strong and healthy child. The mother is surely proud of him."

The weary man put his hands to his forehead, weakly, and thought for a moment, the brain working slowly in the enfeebled body.

"Yes," he replied after a time. "It seems to me that there was a little baby—a tiny one that

was crying in my arms as I bore him. But—but leave me alone, I want to sleep again, my eyes will not stay open."

"One moment! Just one moment and thou wilt lie down again. Tell me how it came to be with thee, and where is its mother who must be crazed with misery because she is not with it?"

"How can I know about the mother?" answered Loveland. "It seems to me that I remember picking up a child that was lying upon the ground; but I cannot tell what were my thoughts, for I was very faint with long traveling and my head is still confused."

"Yet in regard to the mother!" insisted Atuk's wife.

"Thou art the only woman I have seen since leaving the great lake of Mukumeshu," he went on. "It seems to me that I must have pitied the little thing and took it with me, since it was lost."

"Yet I know that Ameou would never have abandoned her child!" exclaimed the Nascaupee woman. "It is a thing even the beasts of the forest will not do!"

"Ameou's child!" he cried. "How can it be her child? Woman! what art thou saying? It would then be my own little one that was awaited! Ay, my own little child!"

His hands began to tremble with the sudden palsy of a great emotion, and tears had come to his reddened eyes. He was looking at the woman, hungrily, as if begging her for further enlightenment, whereupon she ran into her tent and brought the infant back. It was sleeping soundly, content with a foster mother's care.

"Now, Yellow Hair, look thou and see!" she cried, handling the baby with loving touch and pushing back the little beaded cap of softest skin.

"Ay, take a good look, Uapishiu, for it is thy little son! Look at the fluffy down that is on the head! It is darker than thine, but not like the hair of other babies. This will fall off soon to make room for more. No, do not touch him or he will awaken, for it will soon be time for another feeding. Ay, it is a strange little head and the down has a touch of the sunlight that is upon thine.

"Moreover there is the little face! In a

moment I will show thee my own baby, who is surely also very beautiful, and thou shalt see how much lighter the skin of this one is. The eyes, as thou shalt see when he wakens, are very dark, but they are not brown, like ours, but of a dark blue like the color of deep water.

"Now who is there that could have a baby such as this one, born perhaps a half a moon ago, with such hair and eyes, and a skin so fair? I tell thee, Uapishiu, that it can only be the one Ameou was awaiting happily when I last saw her, and in whom she had so much pride and hope, thinking it would keep thy love always very strong. And therefore it is thy little *ouash!*"

The man was staring at her, with swimming eyes. A curious sense of happiness was coming over him, gradually, as his brain began to work more clearly. Then he fell on his knees before the woman, who had sat on a log before the fire, with the precious burden in her arms.

"Oh! My own little son," he said, in a very low voice that trembled, as if he feared that this was some wild illusion which had come to him during the time of his striving to reach Tshemuak,

and which he feared to dispel. "Is it my own baby—the son of my beloved one, of Ameou, on whose breast he should be lying now? O! Woman! Hast thou really taken my baby to thy heart? But then where is Ameou?"

He struggled to his feet, swaying, as if he meant to start in instant search of her. He looked at the two Indians with a pitiful, enquiring expression, and again, in his great weakness, the salt and bitter tears began to gather and burn his eyes.

"Oh! Why didn't you tell me?" he reproached them. "You have been deceiving me, I fear. There is something you have been keeping from me. You would not tell me that she was dead. How can it be otherwise, since she is not here? Hers was the gentlest soul on earth but she would have clung to her child more fiercely than the mother of the whelps of wolves.

"And so she is dead, I know, and I cannot tell why the baby was all alone in the woods, so far away. Had she been living she would have fought for it, and cried for it, and hunted for it high or low, in the night and in the day! And so

she must be dead—and—and I am unhappy that I struggled so long. It would have been so easy to lie down and die!"

He dropped again to the ground and sat down with his head down on the hands that rested on his knees, overcome with a grief which, in his pitiful exhaustion, he found no power to restrain.

The mother-woman beside him looked at him, pityingly, for by this time she shared his belief.

But after a short time Loveland arose and seemed to have greater control upon his limbs than before. He put one hand on the woman's shoulder.

"I—I thank thee for thy care of my little son," he told her, hoarsely, "and for thy kindness to me. I will be able to show my gratitude for that which thou didst for him and for me, after I return to Tshemuak. But now I must think for a time and be alone with the sorrow that is upon me, which is far more bitter than all the pain I endured since I came out of the great White Rapids."

He took a stick lying near at hand, one of several that were cut handy for hanging pots over

the fire, and moved away a short distance into the thick woods. The man Atuk would have followed him but the good wife interfered.

"No. He is safe now. Some strength has returned to him. It will perhaps be good for him to stay for a time, face to face with his grief. It may be that he will talk with his Manitou, as do some of the white men who come to put water on the brows of little children, and it will comfort him. He will not go very far. See, he is sitting down now. It will be very easy to bring him back when it begins to storm. The clouds are very black!"

Loveland, indeed, had wandered off but a short way, and let himself fall on the first convenient fallen tree. Atuk had promised to take him over to Tshemuak in his canoe—that very afternoon as soon as he should have gathered in the smoked fish that could not be left out of doors, for the weather was getting squally and the big rain was not far off. He would be able to lie down in the boat. A few hours more and the long journey would be ended.

But what cared Loveland now? Tshemuak,

Many Beaver Lake, or even the peaceful fields and hedgerows of his own country, were all alike to him now. One place was as good as another to suffer in. There could be no such thing as happiness anywhere, for the world was altogether too harsh and cruel. He suddenly remembered an old Oriental saying—that it was better to lie down than to stand, to sleep than merely lie, to be dead than sleeping.

The only desire remaining in him now was for surcease of his pain. He wished that his brain might become so dulled again as to make thought impossible. He remembered regretfully the time when he had been unconscious in the White Rapids, or when, on his journey, he had seemed to wander without thinking, with no sense of acute pain, moving instinctively by virtue of some unreasoning influence which was like the wind that carried away the leaves.

"If only my head had remained under water when I was cast upon that rock," he told himself, "or if the whirlpools had swallowed me. I had been all through the fear of death, there was no more pain, everything had passed away so that

all my life was blotted out. There never would have been any more pain. What an awakening!"

And then, mercifully, as he sat there all hunched up like some poor, feeble, old man, the thought came to him, gradually, that his baby was there, only a few rods away, sleeping within the tent where he lay peacefully while the others had gone off to look after their fish.

He slowly realized that this baby was a legacy left him by the woman he had so greatly loved, who had put an element of tender joy and great happiness in the great wilderness. Since she was doubtless dead it was his duty to look after it, to give it all care and love—if love could possibly remain in a breast that now seemed to be shriveled with suffering and able to bring forth nothing but the cruel breathing that prolonged his agony.

Yet the fighting instinct was returning. He felt that he must react. The moment was surely coming when he must resume the struggle he had now waged so long. He must appeal to his manhood and his sense of duty.

Yes! He would grit his teeth and stand the

punishment again, just as he had stood it during those horrible days of toil that were yet a nightmare.

His thoughts came clearly enough now, and yet at times his brain would become sluggish again, and he would no longer realize that the constant going was over with. Every few minutes he caught himself attempting to rise, looking vaguely for his pack, persuaded that he must resume his journey. Two or three times he got to his feet, hurriedly, with a fear upon him that he had again wasted precious minutes. Then, not very far away, he would see the tent, and the poles that served for the drying of fish, and the fireplace where a few blackish embers smouldered, and he would understand again and sit down heavily, and think again.

Surely Ameou, with her last breath, must have enjoined him to take care of her little child, to give him the love that had been hers only.

"Yes, I must do it!" he told himself, bravely. "I must think of the poor little thing with the deep blue eyes! Yes, in good time I shall be strong again, and well, so that I shall be able to

work once more and make a living for the two of us. He is lucky! He will never understand how much he has lost.

"But I can't go back to Tshemuak to-day. I can't do it yet. I don't want to go and look in her father's tent, and I couldn't go into our room at the post, where all her things are, everything that belonged to her. To-morrow I will be able to stand it, or perhaps the next day; it makes no difference—then Atuk will take me down there, and—and it will be lonely. Perhaps some day I may get transferred to some other post, far away, where everything won't remind me of her."

A greater peace came upon him then, and the thoughts were no longer quite so harrowing. Obedience to duty is the first great law to be upheld by one who calls himself a man. Duty to others, and duty to one's self and one's honor, yes, that was the greatest thing in life. The call to him was clear, it could be neglected only at the cost of his manhood, and—and so he would answer it as bravely as he could—with all his energy that must return to him in the coming days.

He was tranquil now, beginning to feel more

rested, his weary limbs and torn flesh ceasing to irk him so much. The path he would have to follow was hewn out straight before him. He would have to carry no greater burden than other men had borne sturdily, with the courage of a strong ancestry. All over the world they were toiling manfully, under the stress of pain and sorrow, many of them, and bearing up bravely and without whining. He leaned forward, looking toward the camp where his wonderful inheritance of flesh and blood was lying asleep and yet calling upon him loudly to meet his obligations.

CHAPTER XVII

THE RESCUE

For a time Loveland sat quietly, sometimes perhaps dozing a little, in the restfulness of spirit and the ease of body that were gradually returning to him. He watched the great black clouds banking to the northward, above the great blue hills, and the fluttering of leaves, well nigh the last to cling to their branches, which were now being torn away. The great world was making ready for the long sleep of winter, for the resting of the earth and its vegetation, for the dying away of the buzzing, stinging legions of flies, the crawling and creeping insects whose myriads had dwelt under every leaf and upon every blade of grass and mossy fibre. The snows would come and the land be in shackles again, and over the immensity a few puny men would toil, and lose their lives, that women of another world might wear the spoils.

Presently he heard something moving behind

him, but paid not the slightest heed to it. It might have been merely a weasel on the trail of a hare, or some impertinent and quarrelsome red squirrel who, as soon as he discovered that the still form was a human being, would chatter away in foolish anger. It was not worth turning his head to see.

And then he felt the touch of a hand upon him; but he reacted dully to the surprise and turned his head slowly, perhaps thinking that Atuk had come up behind him—and then his eyes fell upon the half-breed's face.

His only feeling when he recognized Mashkaugan was one of pleased surprise. They had got along well together; it was a friend, a companion of long traveling, who doubtless had felt bitter sorrow for his accidental share in the disaster. But as he stretched out his hand the hunchback shrieked in fear and fled through the underbrush like a wounded moose. Loveland tried to call, but his voice was low and hoarse. The man never heard him.

The amazement that had come upon him was succeeded by laughter—actual hysterical laugh-

ter such as may come to women with nerves overwrought—something that came against his will and that he strove against, for it was shaking him and hurting the bruised muscles of his chest. For a moment his inflamed eyes burned again with scalding tears. Finally he controlled himself again, feeling ashamed of his weakness.

Picking up his stick and leaning heavily upon it he slowly made his way back to the tent, where he was soon joined by Atuk and his wife, who carried large bundles of dry fish and placed them in a little lean-to well covered with large slabs of bark for protection against the coming rain. They looked at him in some astonishment, for there were still traces of the strange mirth that had shaken him, and which they could not understand.

"I was sitting yonder, on the dead jack-pine," he explained to them. "That fellow Mashkaugan came up behind me and touched me. When I turned to look, and would have shaken hands with him, he howled and ran off through the woods like a caribou. I wonder what was the matter with him? I should think he would have been glad to see me living and safe."

The nervous tendency to laugh had left him. He was looking at the two Nascaupees, seeking from them some explanation of the man's strange behavior.

"He had not thought to see thee," said Atuk's wife, confidently. "He believed as we all did thou wert dead, and coming upon thee from behind and seeing thee of a sudden he took thee for —for one of the spirits of those who are dead. And so he ran away in fear. I am not astonished that he was afraid."

"Ay," assented Atuk, speaking low and looking uneasily about him, for it is not lucky to mention certain things, "to Mashkaugan thou hadst become a—a *windego*, a devil of the forests or the waters, that maybe was seeking his life. There are many strange things, as thou knowest. But he will be ashamed when he comes to know that thou art really living, and he will crave thy pardon and ask us not to speak of this thing, for others would laugh at such a tale against him. Come now! It is time for thee to eat again and gain more strength. It is coming to thee fast, I can see, and already thou art a very different man, standing

straight, with thy legs no longer shaking under thee. I am glad!"

The man spoke truthfully; Loveland had managed to gain the liking of all the Indians who had come to the post. He was fair to them and kindly always, listening to them without impatience, easily moved to laughter with them, when something amused them. For Indians are only silent, and of surly looks, when strangers are about, whom they do not know and who may laugh at them. Among themselves and those they know well they are often cheerful and even mirthful, and many of their stories display a keen sense of humor.

The two men sat on the ground while the woman waited on them, according to custom. Nor is this a matter in which the men try to lord it unjustly over the women. The hunter comes home, often wearied almost to death and suffering from hunger. He has done his share and the woman, who has not toiled so hard, attends at once to his needs, for her own may wait. The Indian woman is often much better and more fairly treated by her mankind than we may think from superficial observation.

In spite of the food he had already taken Loveland felt hungry again and his host and hostess were greatly pleased to see how well his appetite was returning.

There was no longer any reason for the great care they had taken at first not to overfeed him. Atuk's wife piled a clean sheet of bark high with fresh-boiled fish and meat of a rabbit she had snared, and brought him a great pancake hot from the frying-pan, with a big tin cup of strong tea, urging him only to eat slowly.

After this meal Loveland felt a great deal better. When he rose and stretched his limbs a little vigor had returned, and, but for the soreness of his feet, he felt that he could have walked a long distance. The trip overland to Tshemuak, he felt, would have been no more than he could have accomplished. He was young and of powerful build, having all of youth's ability to recuperate fast. Yet from time to time he coughed a little, and felt the chill so that he was glad to hug the fire. A little later he moved away conscious of being too warm. A new sense of throbbing heat in his head gave him added discomfort. He told

his hosts of his decision not to return that day, and Atuk said that it was wise, for the weather was beginning to spoil badly and a good night's rest would surely do him ever so much good.

Presently the baby, his own little one, began to cry. Loveland went into the tent and with infinite precautions, and yet clumsily, took it up in his arms. A strange thrill of pleasure penetrated his being, something that held a measure of comfort and consolation, and he rocked the child on his knees, yet in such wise as to bring it peace.

Atuk's wife, when she raised the flap of the tent and came in, smiled broadly when she beheld this sight. Never would an Indian man have dandled a baby; but white men were strange beings, of course, and the sight of the father with his little one pleased her. Surely, he was a man of a great and tender heart!

"Now, Yellow Hair, it is time that thy *ouash* should be fed again," she said, as the infant opened its eyes. "See how he is moving his hands and his feet. In a moment he will bellow lustily, for he is a strong and hungry feeder who will grow into a big man who will travel bravely with the paddle

or tump-line. Upon his shoulder thou wilt be able to lean when the years become too many for thee. Give him to me and go out again. The black clouds are coming fast and the storm that has been threatening is very near. Before the big rain go out and shake more of the stiffness from thy limbs, but return in good time here, to keep from a wetting."

The young man left the tent, entrusting his son to Atuk's wife. But for the throbbing in his head it would have been wonderful how the good food and the rest were restoring him. It was only the prospect of the desolation he would have met at Tshemuak Post that kept him from starting afoot. He could easily have reached the place before nightfall. The desire to know everything, to hear of her last hours, began to contend in his brain with the fear of further suffering, and he stood still, leaning upon the trunk of a birch, undecided.

There would be no need of his following the river now, for he could cut across, knowing paths and blazed lines. The journey would take him

but a little longer than if he had traveled in a canoe.

All this country close to Tshemuak he had hunted and fished over; every bit of it was familiar to him. In a host of the places he had wandered with Ameou, strolling aimlessly with her through the big woods. She had pointed tracks to him, and called his attention to things he never would have noticed. And they had stopped, and rested here and there, and gloried in the mere happiness of living; and they had gone on and on, the man using tender words, the woman smiling, her heart full and glowing with this wonderful love that had come to her.

He thought sadly of the supreme delight there would have been in his returning strength, if he could only have made it serve for his rushing to the post, glorying in the knowledge that the open arms of the woman would be ready to embrace him, that he would be able to crush her to his breast. But no, he would never see her again. Somewhere, far from the post, the men would show him a grave, placed a long distance away that the

spirits should not be made restless by the presence of many people.

And so the man continued to lean against the tree, desolate and feeling greater loneliness than had come upon him in the great forest, for then he had been returning to the mate who awaited him; each step had brought him nearer to her; in the morning when he rose in pain and hunger and at night when he fell exhausted, her image had been before him and some meed of courage had returned.

Finally he made an effort to shake off these thoughts and, while only partially successful, the effort did him some good. He strolled down to the shore, at the other side of the high rocks, where the Nascaupee had raised scaffolds for the drying of fish. He stood on the shingly beach that was beyond the cliffs falling sheer into the deeper water, and watched the gathering storm. The wind was coming in great gusts, bending hard towards the south the tops of trees and driving the waters of the lake before it in white-capped waves that were dark and turbid in the troughs.

Atuk had prudently taken up his nets and

stretched them out on the shingle, laying stones upon them that they might not be carried off by the gale. The man was crouching close by, scaling a large pike that had followed the white-fish and caught its long muzzle in the meshes of the net, badly tearing it in its efforts to escape.

"It is a great storm," he said loudly, to overcome the roar of crashing waters and howling wind. "It is one such as foretells the coming of the snows, that are not far off. After this not a leaf will remain on the birches and the aspens will be bare. This year the muskrats have built strong houses, high out of water, and the beavers have cut down much poplar for the winter's food. Also the fur is very thick already. I have caught a marten and two mink this week, and they have good pelts. It is to be a long, cold winter."

Loveland nodded. He was standing beside a large tree whose trunk somewhat shielded him from the storm. Atuk left him to carry the pike up to the tent. Over the lake a couple of big gulls were battling hard to reach the other shore. At times they were blown away by the gusts, shrieking out loud, and would turn again, planing

down low until they were nearly among the waves and suddenly shooting up into the wind. Finally they appeared to give up the attempt and sailed away with the blast, driven like arrows.

More and more black clouds were piling in great masses in the sky, coming low and threatening, racing like smoke when a forest fire is rushing on, gale-swept and devouring. On one of the greater lakes the waves would have risen mountain high, but on the shallower little Many Beaver they came short and choppy, in an incessant hurried procession, breaking wildly over the cliffs, rattling up the shingle and receding with a tremendous rolling of the rounded stones.

Behind him, in the forest, Loveland could hear the occasional crashing down of big trees uprooted in their strength, or broken asunder because they were already weakened by age and the boring things that are ever silently at work, bringing death to the once proud and upstanding trunks.

Looking again over the seething waters Loveland suddenly caught sight of something that was moving, very swiftly. It took a number of seconds before he could plainly see what it was.

The rain was coming, in a sudden downpour, driving into his eyes and blinding him, so that he was compelled to hold his hand up for protection. The thing seemed to be leaping over wave after wave as a frightened deer bounds over fallen timber. Yes, it was a canoe, and a man was driving it with amazing power and monstrous skill, and yet it was surely doomed. No such frail craft could keep up such a fight and live. But it was approaching fast. He stood aghast at the boldness of a man who had not feared to start in such a gale and trust himself to those billows. It was frightful, superhuman. Loveland shrieked out to Atuk, who was no longer in sight, being behind some rocks, but his effort was of no avail. Then he saw that if the canoe survived until it came close inshore it would be driven on the rocks. Forgetful of his weakness, with a new energy born in him suddenly, he clambered up the cliffs, lowered himself on broken boulders at their foot and waited the end, intent on doing his best to save the man.

When the canoe slewed about and sank, overwhelmed, he watched the foaming muddy waves

in which the man had disappeared. A head came up; the hands and arms uplifted of a man drowning, and with no thought of his safety he plunged in, striking out desperately.

CHAPTER XVIII

A DAUGHTER OF CHIEFS

When Curran got back to Tshemuak Post he felt very weary, as well as enraged over the miscarrying of his plans. He was a strong man, and in former days one of great endurance, but he had lost the habit of engaging in much physical exercise. For any little trips he might take there were always Indians or *voyageurs* to do the work for him. Formerly he had kept himself in good condition by wandering with his gun in the barrens and the deep woods, in search of game, but of late he had remained at the post all the time, scheming and awaiting the outcome of his plans. His quick journey to Many Beaver Lake and return had tired him in a way that surprised him.

"It must be that infernal booze I've been taking," he reflected. "'Tain't fit for a white man. I'll have to go light on that stuff. It's all right enough for them Injun bucks but like enough it's

playing the devil with me. Shouldn't wonder if it made me nervous, too, with smoking all day long. I'm as jumpy as a wildcat. Wonder where that cussed baby is?"

He was exceedingly ill at ease, for in many ways his plans all seemed to be going wrong. That fellow Mashkaugan had turned against him for no particular reason that he could think of, excepting the fact that he was a superstitious fool who had allowed his brain to become addled by stupid fears. Of course there was nothing for the man to be afraid of, but a fellow who believed in all kinds of ghosts and spirits could not be depended on. There was no saying what he would be up to next.

"It's a sure thing I can't trust him any more, and I'll just have to go it alone. Anyway he was the one who did the—the job over there at White Rapids, and if he blabbed about it there wouldn't be any neck but his own to get stretched. There's no one would take his word against mine! Anyway I was here when it happened, they can all swear to that, and there ain't a word of writing has passed between us. There ain't a thing can

be proved against me, if he talks till he's black in the face."

The man was walking up and down restlessly, in the big living-room of the post building. He couldn't prevent himself from always thinking, and the more he thought the more he worried, in spite of his confident assertions, till he could stand it no longer.

"Just one more swig of that stuff won't hurt me," he decided. "I'm pretty near played out with that paddling. Good thing I got back before it began to blow so hard. It's sure going to be a tough night. Guess I'll go out and see what Mashkaugan's up to."

He helped himself to another drink and went to the half-breed's shack to find it vacant. Enquiry elicited the fact that Mashkaugan had taken his canoe and started alone down the river. This again worried him a good deal. The uncertainty and mystery of it all was beyond his understanding, but it all savored of danger.

He engaged some of the Indians in conversation, seeking to find out whether they harbored any suspicions; whether in any way they were also

turning against him. Of course he knew that none of them had any particular liking for him, but this mattered nothing. They were ignorant savages whom a fellow must keep under his thumb. At the same time it was not safe to actually incur their enmity. They spoke quietly enough, however, and evidently knew nothing. Yes, Mashkaugan had seemed to be in a desperate hurry, but there was no accounting for what he did. Perhaps there was something wrong in his head. Sometimes he acted like a man whom the spirits had marked for their own!

These things they said very low, touching their foreheads significantly and looking about them uneasily. Curran left them and walked over to the old chief's tent, where Nimissuts met him at the door but did not ask him to come in, though some rain was beginning to fall.

"We have all hunted high and low," the agent told him, "but so far there is no sign of the child. I hope nothing has happened to him. I would like to speak with thy daughter."

"I think that Ameou sleeps now. A short time ago she stopped her moaning and her weeping. I

think that a terrible weariness is upon her now. There can be no talking and I know she has no wish to see thee."

Curran looked at the old man, sharply, and the desire came to knock him down but he restrained himself and returned to the post, where he resumed his walking up and down, still thinking deeply and worrying, blindly, for all the things he feared were in utter darkness. Mashkaugan's terrors had been superstition. Curran's were the possibly more harrowing ones awakened by an evil conscience.

He turned around in the room, aimlessly, looking at this and that, and went off to the storeroom, pretending to himself that he was inspecting the stock, and wandered away to his room, restlessly. The door of the one occupied by Loveland and his wife had been left open and he went in, aimlessly. It was a rather bare place. On the wall a few illustrations cut out from papers had been tacked, and a few photographs received from home. The furniture was scanty, practically all of it being home-made and much of it still showing marks of cross-cut saw or axe. Some

shelves had been made from pieces of provision boxes. They held perhaps a dozen well-thumbed books and various odds and ends, a few boxes of cartridges, a tiny looking-glass for shaving, some cheap toilet articles. Also Curran saw a small and battered tin cash-box of black enamel. This suggested an idea.

"Guess he kept his old papers and things in that," he told himself. "Wonder why I never took a look at them? Might be something that'd come in handy."

Without the slightest compunction he took it down. It was unlocked, for there never had been any need for keys in Tshemuak. It contained a few dollar-bills, much soiled and worn, since fresh clean money seldom finds its way in the wilderness; he also found a little loose silver and some of the large Canadian pennies. The amount was not sufficient to interest him. Of legal-looking papers he could find none, but there was a bundle of old letters tied with a bit of fish-line, which he opened and looked over idly.

He yawned over them. Nothing but long letters from his sister at home, with a lot of details

about children happening to need a doctor, or going to school, with information about the parson and other people, of not the slightest interest to the chief agent.

One of these papers, however, caused him to stop as he reached the signature, and he scratched his head.

"Thunder!" he exclaimed. "That wouldn't be a bad idea. That girl's got to stop thinking such a lot of Lawrence and then I'll be able to do something with her, may be!"

The evil smile returned to his face as he looked over the last lines again.

"Yes, he read this one to me when it came. Any old thing was good enough to read over and over in this neck of the woods. He was always talking about that sister of his and her kids."

The man grinned again. His keen evil mind had been quick to seize a point of vantage. Here was a chance for a neat little stroke of diplomacy. He returned to the living-room after putting the box back in its place and tying up the bundle, but the letter was in his pocket. Then he went out on the porch and looked towards the old chief's tent.

Ameou was coming out of it. He went indoors again.

"Cyprien!" he called, and the lame old Indian retainer promptly responded.

"You go over to Nimissuts. Tell him that I want to see him and his daughter here. Something very important. Tell them to come right here, d'ye understand?"

The man nodded and limped off to deliver his message. As soon as the old chief heard it he spoke to Ameou, hurriedly. She had always refused to enter the post building alone, when Curran was there, giving one excuse or another. Now, however, she had no fear since her father would be with her, and thinking that the agent had perhaps received some information about the child she hurried the old man over, so eager was she to hear the news.

Curran met them at the door and bade them enter, assuming a sad but friendly expression such as might befit the occasion. He pushed a chair towards Ameou and placed tobacco within the old fellow's reach.

"I am afraid that all this searching may be for

nothing, although I still have hopes," he said, shaking his head sorrowfully. "And now I suppose you will be going away in a few days, though I have advised against it. Whatever you do, I wanted to say that Ameou shall take anything she wants that belonged to Loveland. And if there is anything of his that she wants to keep, and yet not take away with her to your hunting country, she can put it in empty boxes from the store-room. It shall be kept safely here until you come back at the breaking of the ice. I do not think there is anything here which the people who really own the property could object to her taking. They would not want them to be carried across the great waters."

He spoke in Montagnais, slowly, watching the two Indians as a lynx might watch the fledgeling brood of a partridge.

"There is no one but my daughter who owns any of the things that belonged to Yellow Hair," said Chief Nimissuts, slowly. "The men of the brigade that went away told us that a paper had been made, on which they had put their names. And the meaning of this paper was that every-

thing that belonged to Ameou's husband, should he ever be taken away, would be my daughter's."

The old man was looking at Curran keenly. The foxy old fellow had been quick to discern some strange meaning in those words of his. But the young woman had sunk dully in the chair, caring nothing. Such matters were of no import to her, she had lost everything in the world that she cared for.

"Ah! The paper!" exclaimed Curran. "In truth there was such a paper, and my name was also put upon it. It is here. I have it. Ameou can have it if she wants it, for I can get it out of the safe place. But I fear greatly that such a paper is no good at all, because it is the custom of the white people that there can be but one wife to a man. If there be two of them the second can have nothing when the man dies, for she is really not a wife. But the other one will not care for a gun and a few old clothes, or blankets."

Ameou sprang up, with eyes flashing and limbs trembling with excitement. She walked up to the agent and placed her hand on his arm, looking straight at him.

"*Katshilat!*" she shrieked. "Thou liar! And the son of a liar art thou!"

She was but a poor savage, though a splendid woman of great beauty. She had not been taught to conceal her emotions, to hide her feelings under a cover of hypocrisy; and she was wounded to the heart and insulted in her faith and trust in the man she loved.

"I am Ameou!" she said, proudly. "I am the woman who was the wife Yellow Hair took to his breast — and the only one! I am the mother of the child that was his. Never did he tell me any tale of another woman that was his, and times untold he said that I was the only woman he ever loved. His heart was in my keeping alone!"

Curran, who had stepped back at the insult, came forward again, shaking his head in pitying fashion.

"Yes, surely he told thee so! Men who long for a woman will say those things, alas! It is a tale they have told women times in greater number than there are stars in the sky. He should not have said it to thee, a believing and trusting

maiden. Ay! I do not wonder thou doubtest my words. I am sorry I spoke of this."

The young woman looked at him, dazed and haggard. In spite of her brave words the iron had entered her heart, feeling as she did that her one last great treasure was being torn away from her—the sturdy belief she had in her husband's goodness, in his good faith and honesty—and everything that made him the only man in the world to her.

In times gone by some Indians had possessed several wives, until the missionaries came, but it seldom occurred, for a living was hard enough to make for a small family. But then these white men of the Manitou had come and said it was a thing accursed of their God. How could Uapishiu of the Yellow Hair have done such a thing? The very teaching he had imparted to her during those long happy evenings spent together during the long winter had not only been directed to showing her how to read and write, but also to the expounding, simply and in a few words, of some of the higher ideals that move the conduct of decent men. And now this man Curran was seek-

ing to make her believe that all this was nothing but a mockery spoken with the forked tongue of a deceiver! She had been made a plaything of, according to him, while she had hung upon his lips!

"I will not believe it!" she suddenly cried. "There are no words but thine own to show these things, and they sound like lies, only lies!"

She was standing before him like some wild creature at bay, defying him with flashing eyes his own could scarcely meet, and his teeth came together hard.

"Thou hast called me a liar," he said, quietly enough. "Did Loveland show thee all the papers he had in his little box in the room? I have seen them all, and there was one he left down here, which I will show thee."

"He said they were things that did not matter," answered Ameou.

"Thou never didst seek to read them after he went away?" he asked again, cautiously.

"I am the daughter of a chief," she said, lifting up her head. "I am the woman who belonged to one she thought was a man. Would I have

pried into things of his he did not bid me to look at?"

The young woman, again erect and with that fine head of hers thrown back, looked like a model of wounded dignity. Curran was looking at her. Her grace and her pride doubtless impressed him, but in evil fashion. Yes, he would surely marry her and tame the proud beauty. Her picturesque comeliness would be his at no distant time, and the humbling of her would be a diverting thing.

"Well! Here is the letter I was speaking of," he answered after a moment. "Of course thou didst not seek to pry, for thou art surely a true woman, and the day was an evil one when this man Loveland took thee to wife. But look now at these words that have been written by another woman who is waiting, longing for his return. Since thou hast learned to read it is easy for thee to see. Sit down here again—in the light. The words that tell all begin here."

With shaking hands she took the bit of paper he had placed before her and spelled out the words,

slowly, her heart sinking within her, with a great pain.

And now, my dear Lawrence, come back soon from those dreadful places. You would surely be so much happier here with me. The baby boy who bears your name sends you a thousand kisses.

Your loving AGNES.

Ay! She wrote that he would be happier with her. The baby who bore his name! A thousand kisses! A woman who loved him!

Slowly the paper fluttered to the floor and Ameou's head sank upon her folded arms.

She had received the news of her husband's death with few tears, for her hurt had been too great for the grief to have been expended in weeping. It had stunned her as a blow, leaving her weak, bereft of thought, suffering like an animal crushed by the falling of a tree. Again the loss of her baby had left her staring and dry-eyed, like one under the spell of some baneful drug, and all that she had done was accomplished blindly, like the struggling of men in delirium. But this was the fiercest blow of all, since it was shattering

all that she had treasured of love and belief.

Old Nimissuts stood there, looking from one to the other. It is probable that he only faintly appreciated his daughter's suffering. The wild-cat or the vixen deprived of her young became fierce, but another year she raised a second family. If her mate were killed another would be forthcoming at the next season. He was but a man—understanding little of a woman's heart.

But he suspected something, in his shrewdness, and through the mask worn by Curran he could distinguish something suspicious, something that made him feel that the man, in some manner, was playing a deep and evil game.

But at last Ameou lifted up her head and dashed her hand across her streaming eyes. Her face was again calm but for the occasional quivering of her lips.

"If the man had asked me only for my love I would have given it to him," she said, speaking slowly and in low tones. "I loved him. The blessings of the old bearded man meant nothing to me. I would have belonged to him because my heart went out to him. What did I care for mar-

riages, for anything? What did I know of men and women but that they mated when the price was paid, and what cared I for the price? I knew nothing of husbands and wives according to the customs of you white people! What did I care for their ways in this country, where none ever come but those who are eager for the pelts of beasts?"

"If he had told me the truth it would have mattered nothing. I suppose the white man was master of the country he would live in and of the woman he would love! But then he ought not to have told me those other things and shown me a world that was new to me! Why did he teach me those things which he called goodness and other words that had no true meaning? Now I am left to find that none of them were real. He was deeming me a thing to laugh at and mock!"

"But all other men are not as he was," said Curran, loftily. "I could have loved thee truly. Indeed I love thee now, and have sought in every way to ease thy pain and look after thy needs, when—when the thing happened. I would that

thou couldst in time become my wife and learn what a true man is."

Ameou looked at him, but it is probable that the words he spoke made no impression on her. She hardly seemed to understand them and neither looked offended or displeased. It was as if he had not spoken.

"I am but an Indian woman now," she said, "as I was before—a thing to be sold to the one who will give the most guns and blankets for her and for the land that was her mother's. I no longer care anything for what may befall me. I will work again as our women do, for I am strong, and like them I will soon grow very old with toil, and eat after the men have had their fill with food, and set snares for hares and work at the shoe-packs and the stringing of snowshoes and the making of nets. What do I care for men, or for the goodness that is all a lie, or for the child that was born of a liar? I go now!"

She was about to leave the room, a quiet, stately, dignified picture of outraged womanhood; but her father who had been grimly silent during all this talk, bade her stop a moment.

"As to the child," he said, "the whole of one day and night has not yet passed since he was stolen away, and he may be living yet. This man Curran has said that he is willing to take thee for a wife and also care for the child if it is found, as well as for thee and thy people."

"And I have said to him that if any one should bring it back all that I have in the world would go to the finder. If it is brought and the man claims me I will be his woman if he wants me, for I care nothing what becomes of me.

"But I do not care now whether the child is dead or living, it is all one. It was a part of the happiness that is all gone—a happiness a woman may purchase only with suffering. I have paid too great a price for the days that have gone, and have nothing left to buy more. I am thy daughter, Nimissuts, for thee to barter away as thou hast a mind to, and then I will pray to all the gods, the white men's and ours, that I may be a curse upon any man that takes me for a wife. Perhaps, hearing of this, they may leave me in peace!"

She was growing excited again, for her arms

were trembling and her breath came in short gasps.

"I tell you I care nothing!" she shrieked again. "Nothing for the dead man who was a liar—and nothing for the whelp of the liar! I care nothing for any man—for all men are liars! Let me alone, I tell you! Speak to me no more! Arrange all things between you but only give me peace for a time, or I will also seek the deep waters. What care I whether I am with the *windegos* of hell or with the men who make hell here? Leave me alone, I say!"

She went out of the room with defiant head held upright, but her fingernails were driven in the palms of her hands and her teeth were clenched. She was trying to control herself, for a terrible longing had come upon her to rush down to the river-bank and seek the peace to be found below its dark waters.

CHAPTER XIX

WORDS OF COMFORT

After Ameou had left the big living-room her father turned to Curran, who was looking angrily at the girl's departing form. The old man's face was impassive; not the faintest trace of emotion was visible upon it, yet when the agent began to pace up and down the shrewd old eyes followed the man, back and forth, till Curran stopped suddenly and snarled at him.

"Get to the devil out of here!" he cried, threateningly, but Nimissuts never moved, merely pulling his pipe out of his mouth.

"I am minded that thou art as mad as the man Mashkaugan," he said, quietly. "First the one and then the other. Is it thy way of making love to a woman to first drive her to despair, so that she will listen to no one? Thy bigness is not as great as thy folly. What matter it if Yellow Hair has one wife or as many as a man's fingers? Thou art a fool!"

The consciousness that, in his eagerness to turn Ameou against the very memory of her husband, he had seemed to fall into a grievous error, only further angered the agent. Everything was going wrong, and this old fellow was scolding him and reproaching, forgetting that he was but a low down savage who ought not to have said his soul was his own in the presence of the chief of Tshemuak Post. He took a step forward, in his exasperation, and drew back his great fist. But he stopped, suddenly, for Nimissuts held his big sheath-knife in his hand. There was a moment of silence, during which the old fellow ostentatiously scraped the bowl of his pipe, and then Curran collapsed in a chair, his brow moist, a man defeated, while Nimissuts moved to the door, quietly.

"Thou and I together have talked of thy marrying my daughter Ameou," he said, "and it might be well that this should come to pass. Thou hast heard her say that I could give her to whom I wished, but a woman's talk when she is maddened should not always be listened to in belief. Thou hast done nothing but harm to her, making her

crazed with sorrow, and to thyself whom she will hate for telling her the truth—if indeed it be the truth. Thou makest no answer—it is as well, for I have it in mind that perhaps thou wouldst not keep thy promises to me. In two or three days I go away to my hunting. When the leaves come again we may speak of this again—because now, in spite of what she said, she would perhaps take an axe to me should I speak to her of marrying again. Women are strange things, and a man such as thou stranger still."

He went out, wearing a most disgusted air, leaving Curran to curse to himself, and sought his tent, stopping outside, for the women were talking excitedly and he had much wisdom.

When Ameou had reached her father's shelter she had thrown herself upon the blankets, exhausted by the excess of her suffering. The wife of Nimissuts came and crouched beside her, gently stroking her forehead without uttering a word, for even the women of savage people often have ways such as some of their white sisters may be mistaken to think belong to them exclusively.

After a time her gentleness had some effect, and

by and by the younger woman was pouring out to her the story of these last bitter moments she had gone through, sobbing as if her heart must break.

"There be liars in all places, Ameou," finally said the older woman, after wisely waiting till the flood of words had ceased and the girl was calmer. "In my own mind I believe that Uapishiu of the Yellow Hair was a man who spoke that which was true. Art thou not too ready to put faith in that one man against the other, who was ever good to thee? What other lie has Yellow Hair ever told thee or any one?

"This one thou believest he told, or the concealing from thee of these things, comes to thee from the mouth of this man Curran, who wants also to wed thee. To me comes in mind the defiling of a cache by a wolverine, who fouls what he cannot take away. Is Curran not the man who has sold drink that takes a man's speech away or drives him to staggering and using foul talk? Is it not believed that some of the furs he buys are never sent to the company, to whom the flour and all things belong that they are bought with?

How did this Scarface get that which drove him crazy, or the youth of the old people of Mukumeshu come to his death? And this is the man thou believest now! When did Yellow Hair ever do any of these things?"

Ameou rose upon her elbow. A faint ray of hope had entered her heart and she grasped the woman's arm, staring at her.

"Yes, tell me when Yellow Hair ever did any of these things. We may know little of the ways of white men, but none of them may hide all they do from us. Our men who have bought the burning waters talked foolishly in their tents, and the women knew, and these things are told, in the gossiping, when the men are away, so that at last every one knows."

She was getting excited. Little did Curran know how widely his doings were talked about, in spite of the oaths of secrecy he exacted and the threats he made.

"Oh! Ameou," she cried. "What kind of a woman art thou to believe all that a man like Curran says, just because the dead man can no longer speak for himself? Have a care, child,

lest thy little one be still living and the spirits of the Manitous be angered and deem thee unworthy of it and let it perish instead of bringing it back to thee!"

"But I saw the writing of the woman who begged him to return, who spoke of the child that must have been his own!" cried Ameou, sobbing.

"What do I know of writing?" replied the woman. "How canst thou tell that lies are not also written? What are little marks on this stuff that looks like the fine inner lining of young bark? Do they tell thee that Yellow Hair did not love thee? A stronger and greater love than his no woman ever had, I tell thee. If the man had lived thou wouldst have fought for his love, against all. But now he is dead. The spirits of the great rapids have taken him, and the great love he bore thee is a thing to take away and bury, as we bury parts of certain animals lest our dogs may find them and the spirits of the animals be offended. Thou thinkest it is a thing to be cast away because nothing is left of him but a spirit that has not yet found voice to speak to thee in

thy dreams? What shall he say to thee, in the night, if thou hast wronged him?"

Then Ameou rose upon her couch and clung to the wife of her father, weeping, for the woman's words had brought her the first faint spark of comfort she had received since the hand of fate had been uplifted against her.

As they spoke together the wind had risen and was beginning to shake their tent. The wife went out to help her husband drive hard the pegs to which the ropes were fastened, and Ameou followed. Over the river, in the long stretch to the north, the waves rose and were blown to spindrift. A bark canoe that had been lying on the bank was suddenly caught up by the gale and dashed to pieces among the short stumps of the clearing. The treetops were bending over and dead branches were flying overhead. Such birds as had not yet gone south were stilled. Over the whole long and narrow valley arose a deep roar. The far hills were blotted out and great drops spattered over those who were hastening to put things in safety from wind and downpour. It was a great storm.

"Canst thou hear the voices of the spirits now?"

asked the chief's wife. "Dost thou know what they are saying and against whom their anger has arisen?"

"I do not," answered the younger woman. "Who is there that can tell? Perhaps it is because I have sinned against the spirit of my husband who is dead. Oh! May I be forgiven if it should be so!"

Having secured the ropes they entered the tent again, while the storm raged, and crouched low, listening to the voices of the tempest, a vague fear in their hearts. Their superstitions crowded before them, picturing the evil forces at work in their world, threatening them with hidden dangers, until after an hour or more the storm began to abate a little and courage came again.

"The wind no longer blows so strongly, Ameou. We have bowed down before it and it is passing away. Be patient, for there is always an end of storms and tears. In the winter the blizzards come and freeze the marrow of some men's bones, but others are left to see a sun so bright over the snows that it hurts eyes that are uncovered."

In a few hours the clouds had all passed away

and the gale had died down while a myriad of stars were shining brightly in the heavens. Ameou, who had been unable to fall asleep, crawled out of the tent and sat by the embers of the fire upon which the evening meal had been prepared, and remained there for a long while, trying to penetrate mysteries which minds better trained than hers have never been able to solve. The world was a very wonderful place, in which life and death were ever fighting. Men stumbled and never rose again; others leaped to their feet and went on as before, carrying their burdens, accomplishing their tasks. Soft winds of warm and scented breaths followed the gales. The world slept under a blanket of snow and awoke radiant with tinted leaves and flowers touched by the hues of rising and setting suns, or of deep blue skies. It lay still under the hiss of the falling flakes and was born again to the song of birds and the music of falling waters. And above this hovered spirits kindly and others intent on harm.

Her weary head fell as she crouched against the great log before the fire, and for a time came forgetfulness of pain, and visions in which the

man came to her, smiling, his yellow hair and blue eyes bringing blessed comfort, and his lips words of love.

CHAPTER XX

THE TEARING OF THE VEIL

After the rescue of the hunchback Loveland, with the help of Atuk, had crawled out of the icy water of Many Beaver Lake.

He shivered and his teeth clattered as the blast struck him, for the terrible weakness of the days that had gone by had been brought on again after his few strenuous efforts to bring Mashkaugan ashore.

"Canst thou walk or crawl? Hurry at once to the tent and bid my woman light the fire in the sheet-iron stove," ordered the Nascaupee, who was busily caring for the half-drowned man, who was breathing. "Take off thy clothes at once and wrap thyself in the blankets. This great hulk of a fool is living still and needs thee not. Tell the woman to come here after she has lighted the fire, that she may help me. *Tshishepalits!* Hurry! Go thou at once!"

Loveland staggered off toward the tent, feebly

fighting against the terrible chillness that was upon him, while Atuk labored over Mashkaugan. The good woman raised her hands in astonishment, while she helped remove some of his things and bustled with the stove. Like every other woman in such cases she began to abuse him, snappishly, while bestowing kindly care on him.

"What wert thou thinking of? Was it not enough for thee to starve and freeze during the cold nights, and to toil on thy journey back until thou art but the shadow of a man, ay, a very *tshipi*, a ghost? And now thou goest to cast thyself in the water through some foolishness!"

In spite of her words she was stuffing birch-bark and little sticks into the stove, making a roaring fire, and putting the kettle upon it for hot tea with which to warm him.

"Thou hast greater need of a woman to care for thee than the little *ouash*," she told him again.

"So I have," assented Loveland, "but run down now and help thy husband. It was in pulling a greater fool than I out of the water that I had to go in. Go quickly and I will see to the fire and watch the boiling of the kettle!"

"This great hulk of a fool is living still and needs thee not. Hurry!" ordered the Nascaupee.

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The sturdy woman ran off to the beach, paying no heed to the pelting rain. She found her husband vigorously rubbing Mashkaugan, whom he had propped up against a rock, where he sat with his long black hair plastered down the sides of his face, that was lanky and hollow-eyed, while his eyes slowly wandered about him. She also went to work with a will, while her husband's voice contended but poorly with the roar of waves and the shrieking wind.

"A big fool thou art, greater than the red-eyed partridge," he was shouting at the man. "Thou hast the name of the greatest man in a canoe in all these parts. It must have been the *windegos* who got their claws upon thee to make thee put off from shore in such a wind, when even *Muak*, the foolish hooting loon, would hardly trust himself to the waves. A fine canoeman thou art indeed, but I have it in mind that my youngest boy, who only now begins to stand upon his feet, could teach thee better."

The Nascaupee was properly indignant, for the lake was not a large one and the storm had given plenty of warning. That which galled him be-

yond endurance was that Loveland must be in a bad plight again, owing to such unconscionable stupidity, after so much had been done to bring him back to his former strength. He kept up his rubbing, none too tenderly, and did not spare his grumbling.

Mashkaugan, however, did not appear to pay the slightest heed to him. The man's eyes wandered about him apprehensively.

"Yellow Hair is not here," he suddenly said. "The vision has passed away. It was the spirit of the dead man that came to me. It is ever troubling. How is it that I am ashore, for I felt the grasp of death? It was upon me, I was seized and dragged down."

"It was no grasp of death," shouted Atuk indignantly, "but the saving hold of a better man than thou. Truly, in the water he is like an otter! Get up now, we will help thee up the path to the tent, where is a good fire. One moment! Take a good hold of me! Thy legs have the strength of stems of water-lilies.

"Give thanks—there are few here to hail Mashkaugan, the great canoeman, who knows not when

a canoe may ride the waves in safety! Shake thyself and move on. Thy face is blue with the cold and hot *nipish*, tea of the strongest, may be the saving of thee. Hurry on and fear not to lean on me."

He pulled at the man, who swiftly found his strength again, since but for the wetting he was unhurt, and they climbed up the rocks while Atuk's wife was wrestling with the canoe, which had come ashore full of water. She dragged it up to safety, finding that but one or two ribs were broken, and some bark split. A few minutes more of pounding would certainly have wrecked it beyond all repair.

She pulled it up after a curling wave had soaked her to her hips, a matter of slight importance to her and belonging to the day's work, after which she turned it over on the shore, and rushed up to the tent, knowing that her help would be badly needed. Upon entering it she found her husband staring at Mashkaugan, whose face was livid and whose eyes, beneath the bushy brows, showed fear inexpressible.

The man was kneeling in front of Loveland,

who was lying down, wrapped in a warm company blanket of flaming red, and whose face also expressed amazement. At this the Nascaupee and his wife burst out in laughter. Indeed the two men presented a strange spectacle and one that might well have excited the mirth of any folk. In a corner of the tent a couple of young children stood, gravely sucking their thumbs, while their beady eyes gleamed with the unwonted excitement of the scene and showed some signs of fear.

"Come! I tell thee to rise, Mashkaugan," Loveland was ordering the man before him. "What crazy behavior is this? Take off thy coat and shirt, that are wet, and put a blanket on thy shoulders. Draw near the stove! What is the matter with thee? Has the fear of death robbed thee of thy senses? The last time thy eyes fell upon me I was far nearer death than ever thou wert in thy life, and I don't wonder thou art surprised to see me. But I am all right now, but for a throbbing in my head. Come nearer, like a man, and shake hands with me in mind of our many camp-fires together and the bread and salt

we shared together in the waste places of the Mukumeshu country. Ay! I can even find it in my heart to forgive thee for leaving the White Rapids so soon. Hadst thou waited and sought for a time to see whether I was truly dead I would have been spared a terrible journey home, one that nearly killed me a second time."

"Yes, rise, thou big fool!" echoed the Nascaupee. "Now thou seest that the dead man has come to life. The pair of you, each in his own time, have thought to take the last gulp of air. But now Uapishiu Yellow Hair, whom thou wert so sure was a corpse, leaped into the water and pulled thee out. Surely it was the bravest thing a man ever did, and braver still on account of the terrible weakness that was upon him, whereby he is yet as thin and long as *Upumishui*, the eel. There is not flesh enough on his bones to give a whelp of foxes a meal. Stand up, therefore, and give thanks like a man to one who saved thee at the peril of his life."

Then Mashkaugan rose, slowly. To his heart came a beating that brought a pain in his great twisted breast. His long arms hung flaccidly at

his sides, like those of a great ape, and on his face was the look of one being crucified. The penetrating cold that had seized him could not prevent great drops of sweat from mingling with the moisture that oozed out from his dishevelled locks.

His fear of heathen gods and spirits had been terrible, but it was nothing to the feeling that was overcoming him now that he stood in front of the man he had sought to slaughter in the raging waters of the White Rapids.

The condition of the trembling hunchback was pitiful. The man's teeth were chattering and his features spoke of a strange agony that possessed his being. The Indians, who had laughed, were now sobered. They could not understand and only knew that they were standing witnesses to some strange mystery which frightened them. The children ran out, into the pouring rain.

Loveland painfully rose from his couch and put his hand on Mashkaugan's shoulder, in the friendliest way.

"Now, my good fellow, what is the matter with thee? Indeed I am glad to see thee. Thou wert

very careful of my safety in our travel, and always ready to help and work hard, so that we were friends. What I said just now was not meant for reproach. Thy silly fear overcame thee at that time, as it did this morning—that is all, and if there is anything to forgive I have done so long ago. Thou art surely glad now to see me again, alive and gaining back my strength, owing to the care of these good people."

The young man's looks belied what he said about becoming strong again. He was looking very feeble and exhausted, but he seized one of Mashkaugan's hands in his, in friendly fashion. He was smiling frankly and trying to show kindness to the man, whom he was beginning to pity greatly. But the hunchback moved away.

"Oh! Loveland," he cried, hoarsely, "if everything was known to thee thou wouldst never take my hand in thine again. I—I am less accursed than I thought, but—but I feel as one suffering under the penalty that is meted out to those who have committed the unforgivable sin. I—I would that thou hadst killed me, rather than saved me from the water."

Loveland looked at him, in utter surprise. All these words were utterly beyond his comprehension.

"The man is crazed yet," ventured Atuk's wife, "and I am afraid of him. It may be that his head struck a stone on the beach, though it bears no marks of a hurt. But some strange spirit must have seized upon him to make him go out on the lake in such a storm. The madness has not left him yet, and he suffers from some curse that has changed the working of his brain."

"O woman, I would that thou wert speaking the truth. I would that all that has happened were but a madness that has come to me," groaned Mashkaugan, covering his face with his long bony hands, like a child hiding from strangers.

Atuk touched his forehead with his finger, signifying that the man was certainly bereft of reason. Loveland remained speechless finding nothing that he could say. The weakness made him totter and he sank down on the couch again.

"Come, Mashkaugan," said the Nascaupee very gently, for Indians always hold the insane in some sort of reverence, and Atuk spoke as if he were ad-

dressing a little child. "The woman will leave the tent now and I will help thee take off thy clothing so that we may hang it up to dry. Wrap thyself warmly in the blanket till thy things are ready to put on again, and rest quietly. Perhaps some hot tea will help thee. I have it in mind that the cold of water and wind have been hurtful to thee, but soon wilt thou be better."

He met with no resistance as he began to pull off some of Mashkaugan's garments. There was something that was very pathetic and helpless about the *voyageur's* appearance as he allowed himself to be partly undressed and made to lie down, close to the heat of the little stove.

Presently the woman returned and poured out the hot tea. Loveland took some, gratefully, but the hunchback refused.

"Now take the tea that is given thee," ordered the young man, gruffly, for he thought that a show of authority might prevail where persuasion failed of effect. "Thou art still under my orders and I'll not have such foolishness!"

Mashkaugan looked at him in some surprise but made no further objection. As soon as he

had tasted the stuff he drank a cupful greedily, and it seemed to do him much good.

"The wind is now beginning to go down," said Atuk, "and I must go and see that my nets have not suffered in the storm. There are two of them, fine ones, eight fathoms long and one deep, good ones to set for whitefish that pass through narrow places. I gave ten skins of marten for the newer one. If the wind goes down more I will set them again now, for the fish run well after a storm. Remain still, the two of you, and rest. In a little while I shall return and food shall be made ready."

His wife and the two older children, that had been hovering near, went down to the beach with him, but the wife's baby and Loveland's little son were left in the tent, sleeping together under a blanket of soft fur.

Loveland raised himself upon one elbow, painfully.

"Now tell me, Mashkaugan, what is the meaning of all these things," he said, gently. "I am sure there is nothing the matter with thy head,

but for some queer fancies that have no reason or sense. Speak up, man!"

For a time Mashkaugan glared at him, but the look was still one of fear. By this time all his terrors of supernatural beings had left him, but the knowledge appalled him that he was standing in front of the man he had sought to kill.

Loveland was before him, defenseless and very weak. The slightest blow, or a clutch of his throat, would have been enough to end him. Yet in his feebleness the man was the stronger of the two. By his kindness he had mastered the half-breed, who now cowered before him.

The sense of self-preservation was strong. A few lies or the mere withholding of the truth would have been enough. Loveland need never have known. And yet Mashkaugan was struggling under the pressure of a conscience that had given no rest before, and was hurting him sorely now. He felt pitifully weak and small as he realized that the man he had tried to sacrifice had risked his life for him. Also there was the fear that these dread obsessions would return.

"Oh, Loveland!" he implored. "Do not make me speak! Wait but a short time. My head is still dazed, although I am not crazy, unless with sorrow for things I have done."

He buried his face in his hands, feeling irresolute, trembling on the brink of a confession something urged him irresistibly to make. But of a sudden the prospect of prison walls returned to him—ghastly to a man of the wilderness. To one inured to the walls of a city it is bad indeed to think of a jail; but to one whose whole life has been spent in the wonderful freedom of the pathless northland, on the great wide stretches of swift-flowing rivers, on vast lakes that are like the sea, in camps where no breath of man has ever before defiled the air and the water is cool and sweet, in the breezes that have traveled across thousands of miles of glittering ice or over endless balsam-scented forests, over wide mossy barrens and along the trails running beside snow-capped mountains, the very mention of prison brings up the thought of unendurable torture.

"I shall never go back to it, by God," he swore

out loud, and was stricken with fear at the sound of his own voice.

"What is it now, Mashkaugan?" asked Loveland. "I am perhaps also a little dazed, for I need not tell thee what my journey was like in that awful wilderness, with nothing to eat but handfuls of sodden, mildewed flour. And now I find that other terrible things have happened to me, so that now I am a man to whom there is no meaning in life, but to care for a little baby."

He stopped, for a terrible cough came to him and he put his hand to his side, wincing. Just then the little one began to cry. Loveland took it up, wrapped in the skin of a caribou calf, and held it against his aching breast until it ceased to wail.

"Here is all that is left of the happiness that was mine," he said. "Thy face shows sign of much suffering, Mashkaugan; but I am sure that never such pain as I suffer from has tortured thee."

"There is nothing to prevent thy having all the happiness in the world," answered Mashkaugan, slowly. "When thou art strong again thy life will be as it was before. I am the one who is to

know misery until the last of his days. Yet since thou art not dead it may be that I will not suffer always. How terrible must have been thy journey through the great woods, coming to this place! There are few men who could have made it. Yesterday thou camest here, and I had found thy track, not knowing whose it was, and it was as the track of a drunken man, staggering foolishly, but I know now it was from thy awful weariness. But thou hast at last reached a place of safety and brought to it the little child I was seeking yesterday when I saw thee and fled, for certainly I thought it was thy ghost! All will be well with thee now, but I shall go away, for my soul cannot rest in peace here, after what I have done."

"Upon earth a man's soul fares much as he would have it, Mashkaugan. The only way to find happiness is to keep it clean and never defiled by thought or deed. It is always possible for one to turn upon a straight path and keep to it."

The hunchback stared at him again. An overwhelming impulse was coming over him, so that he was no longer master of his words. He could not pick and choose them any more, telling this

and concealing that, as he was minded. The thought of safety vanished, the terrible fear of prison walls ceased to obsess him. Compulsion that was ever so much stronger than his will began to sway him now and the flood of his words came unrestrained.

"O Yellow Hair!" he cried, "I am a man accursed, for on the day of thy falling in the rapids I was seeking thy death! For days and more days, for a week and still other weeks I watched and watched for my chance, looking for some way to send thee to thy doom so that no other could ever know that I had done it! And until now I thought I had killed thee.

"When we traveled up the river I studied the White Rapids that had already been the death of one man, and knew it was a good place for such a thing. Even then I could have pushed thee over, easily, but it was much better to wait, and travel through the country, coming across men here and there, and showing them what good care I took of thee, so that they might see I was very hard-working for thy good. In this way they would never think afterwards that anything

that happened to thee was other than an accident. It would be so talked of among them, and any words they might bring down to Tshemuak would be of how well we two were getting on, before it happened. Then no one would suspect me.

"So the time came for us to return, after travel that was foolishness, for I knew well that nothing would ever be found for the Company to know. And we came back to the rapids. At this time I had many times wondered whether I would at the last moment be able to do this thing, and I dreaded it. But I followed close behind thee carrying the canoe, and the moment came, and again the awful will to do this thing, and I pushed thee from the shelf with the end of the canoe!

"Not another man could have gone through those rapids and lived, I know well, but thou wert saved to bring me to my punishment, which I deserve. And yet, Uapishiu, I will not go to that prison again. But I forget, of that thou knowest nothing. There is Atuk's gun—in that corner, it is in the caribou hide cover. I will bring it to thee and thou canst shoot me if it is thy will, for I will bring it to thee and never hold up a finger

to hinder thy doing it. Nay, I will be glad. Or an axe may serve, or this sheath-knife that is ground sharp and is keen at the point.

"And if too swift a death seems to thee too good for me thou canst drive it slowly, and thou shalt see that I will not move. Kill me, Yellow Hair—kill me! I have surely deserved death at thy hands, and the Manitous bade thee pull me out of the water in order that the vengeance should be in thy hands!"

His hands shook as he spoke and his voice had grown harsh with emotion.

But at this moment they heard steps near the tent. It was Atuk's wife returning, and she smiled at them as she came in.

"I see thou hast taken up the little one," she said. 'Thy heart is like a woman's. He is surely hungry again. Fortunate am I that I have enough for thy son and my own little *ouash*. Give him to me. He is a sturdy one who will hunt for thee when thou art too old to carry a gun, and upon whose shoulders thou wilt lean."

Loveland gave her the child, and for some time there was silence in the tent, but for a low croon-

ing the woman kept up. Finally she laid the baby down again, covering it carefully.

"Now he will sleep soundly for a time, and I go out once more. Atuk is putting the net down again for the fish are running strong and the storm is over now. The sun will soon show and redden the clouds that are passing away, having uplifted."

She left once more, leaving them alone. Loveland had again lain down, feeling greatly oppressed by a sharp pain that was coming in his side and a bad cough that was beginning to rack his chest, cruelly.

"Come here, Mashkaugan, nearer to me," he said, speaking low and with difficulty. "This strange tale of thine bears the sound of truth but I cannot tell why such a hatred was in thy heart. I know we had hard words in days gone by, but if thou hadst been in my place thou wouldst have spoken as I did to one who had done the things I blamed thee for."

He was interrupted by the cough for a moment, and went on.

"I think I care little to hear the reason for this

dreadful thing now. It must have been but a poor one indeed, or thy regret would not be so great. Since thou art sorry for what thou didst put thy hand in mine now, that we may both forget and forgive, and let bygones be bygones.

"I bear thee no enmity. How could we both live at the post, being enemies, when it is so easy to be friends? Do thy best, as I shall, to look upon me in such a light.

"And now I will stop, for I do not feel well. I am afraid the great cold and the things I suffered have brought on a sickness. I will rest for a time and try to sleep, because I am very weary. I fear I care not much whether I live or die, which is wrong of me, owing to the child. But since Ameou no longer lives I feel some sorrow that I did not remain in the rapids."

"But I saw Ameou only a few hours ago," cried Mashkaugan. "She lives and is longing for thee!"

Loveland dropped senseless on his couch, his head falling low. The fierce toil of his journeying, his efforts to save the hunchback, and now this sudden news had proved too much for him.

When the Nascaupee woman returned to the tent, bearing some fish for a meal, she was horrified to find that Loveland was unconscious. Mashkaugan was sitting by him, holding one of his hands and chafing it, and tears streamed down his cheeks as he watched every breath that came from the laboring lungs.

She immediately knelt by the sick man, asking a hundred questions of the hunchback and wringing her hands. But soon she rose and began to search her pack-bag from which she took a bundle carefully wrapped in birch-bark and tied with long stringy roots of the spruce. From it she selected dried herbs and roots and bark gathered in the spring-time, when the sap is pushing up strongly, and set them in a cooking-pot to simmer on the stove, whence in a few moments some dreadful pungent odors began to fill the tent.

After a time Loveland seemed to revive, but it was only to chatter in a tongue that was unknown to the woman but which Mashkaugan understood, for it was English, though he could make out no meaning, the words coming fast and disconnectedly, in the raving of a great fever. The

woman fed her brood, the children eating hungrily and looking askance at the two strangers, yet losing never a bite; she insisted on Mashkaugan's eating, encouraged by her husband, who was very hungry from an exciting day's work and worries. By this time night had come and the wind had died down to a dead calm, during which a myriad stars, reflected in the still dark surface of the lake, were shining very brightly and close at hand, as they appear to do in the far north countries.

A number of times she poured the evil-smelling liquor of her brewing into a tin vessel, allowing it to cool, and compelled the patient to swallow some of it, in spite of his struggles and protestations.

"Some of this he should have about six times during the night," she said. "I hope I may awaken always in good time, but I am sleepy with hard work and watched him much of the time last night. Awaken me, Mashkaugan, if it happens that thou art not sleeping."

"Sleep thou quietly," Mashkaugan told her. "I promise thee that my eyes will never close this night. I will watch the seven stars turn about

the star of the north, and he shall have the medicine as thou sayest, without failing. I pray it may save his life, though I fear he looks very ill and my heart is heavy, for now it is a great woe."

Throughout the long night the man kept his word, never even the slightest nod coming to allow his head to drop upon his breast. During this time he gave the drug faithfully, keeping very near the sick man and listening to his labored breathing, sadly, for the iron of deep sorrow and regret was entering his soul and now he would have given more than his life to see the man once more hale and strong.

In his life there had been no friendship. Men had been hard and exacting, when they had not shown scorn, although frequently his own sensitiveness had made him believe that he was being shunned, when really there was little but indifference. Gradually he had seen in every man one whose hand was lifted against him, and it had made him surly and bitter. Then he had contravened the laws, and the punishment meted out to him had seemed too harsh, so that he considered

himself a victim and his hatred of mankind was increased.

And now he had found one who had put down his foot, severely, when it had served a purpose which he now recognized to have been fair and just. And this same man, knowing at last that he had been foully dealt with, and subjected to a long and agonizing period of torture, had spoken kindly and extended his hand in forgiveness and friendship, so that now a dense veil seemed to have been torn from Mashkaugan's eyes. The hatred of former days had changed into a form of worship and the heart within the deformed breast was anguished with the thought of seeing Loveland, in the end, succumbing to the effects of the frightful experiences the half-breed had brought about.

From time to time he raised the flap of the tent and looked at the seven stars, as he called the Great Bear. On many occasions during his vigil his long gnarled hands came together as he sought to repeat some prayers the missionaries had taught him when he was young. But when he stopped the desolation of the great sleeping world, of the silent spaces, came to him and harrowed his soul.

CHAPTER XXI

THE ANSWERED PRAYER

Curran went to bed that night, stimulated with some of the alcohol he had resolved to use more moderately. He perhaps thought the moment unpropitious for reform, which could be better carried out at a time when things would have quieted down. Also he had smoked one pipe after another till his tongue was dry and sore. He had an impression that the meal served him by old Anne was the worst he had ever eaten; at any rate it lay like lead upon his stomach. And when he would have slept he remained more widely awake than ever, all manners of uncomfortable thoughts crowding in upon him. He had thought his idea about using that letter an exceedingly clever one, and lo! it had turned out to be the stupidest thing he had ever done. He had driven the girl half-crazy and, as the old man had said, her implied consent to marry him was worth very little. He

never would have thought that she would turn out to be such a termagant! Well, perhaps he would tame her, some day.

As he was unable to sleep he lit his lamp again and went into Loveland's room. There was no use in leaving that bundle of letters there. The girl might take it into her head to come and look them over for more evidence, and discover that they were all from his sister. After taking the package away he returned to his room and, certain that he would not sleep, lay on the bed without turning out the lamp. Finally he dozed off and awoke early, with the room full of the stench of the smoking wick. He dressed and had his breakfast, cursing at the old woman's bread and coffee, after which he went out to inquire whether Mashkaugan had returned, being exceedingly curious to know the reason of his sudden departure. When he found that the canoe was not there and the man had been away during the whole night he was greatly disturbed.

As happens with most individuals who are engaged in iniquitous schemes, the chief agent felt that all men's hands might be raised against him.

The feeling must be a most discomforting one, especially when there are one or two partners in crime who appear to be turning crusty. What business had that infernal hunchback to go away from the post without permission? He was in the company's pay and under the agent's orders.

It really looked as if the fellow was concocting some queer scheme of his own. But, after all, he might only have been continuing his hunt for the child.

Curran had naturally been extremely disappointed at his failure to find the brat. It had been a beautiful plan and, like some others, had gone entirely wrong. He took the disappearance with a certain degree of equanimity, however. After all he had meant to get rid of it at some time or other. If it was gone for good so much the better, perhaps. It might save trouble later on. Yet he foresaw the possibility of awkward questions from prying lawyers. They might hear of the child and insist upon valid proofs of its death, or, at any rate, on fairly reliable circumstantial evidence.

"But then they may never hear about it, and

the will leaves everything to Ameou, anyway. By the time I get her within gunshot of a lawyer I'll have her eating out of my hand and saying what I tell her to. She'll write her name on anything I want her to sign, that's easy enough. But if she goes off and doesn't get back till spring it means an awful delay. I suppose Scarface got rid of the child after all. Must have been angrier than I thought. He must have drunk a lot more of the stuff I gave him; then he changed his mind at the last moment and took it away with him. Or else, as he knew it was Loveland's brat, he took it away with him to put it in the care of some woman in his district, hoping to get a reward for it later on."

None of those ideas was particularly bright or satisfying. They merely went to show that the man was worrying a great deal. He was calm one moment, deciding that everything would turn out all right, and in the next he would feel excited again.

"If the kid should stay alive it might turn up, some day and cause a lot of trouble. All the Indians would know who he was. Best thing I

can do is to marry that girl as soon as ever she comes back and rush her off south with the spring brigade—or maybe on a special trip, just me and her in a canoe.

"When I get her there she'll keep her mouth shut, I'll bet, and I'll go right to work about getting that money for her. Soon as she has it it'll be as good as mine. Loveland's taught her to write her name all right. Then I'll ship her back here, on some pretext. Yes, I can pretend her old man's very ill, or something, or even tell her the kid's found and waiting for her. Then I'll skip with the cash, all signed away to me, so I can't have any trouble.

"The world's choke full of places where a man can have a fine time with a lot of cash and no one to know who he is; but I'd give ten skins this minute to find out what that devil of a Mashkaugan's up to."

He did his best to try to busy himself with various matters requiring attention at the post, but he was constantly compelled to interrupt his work by his anxiety to look over the river and see whether the hunchback might be returning.

His mind was made up! That fellow needed a lesson. He was getting too cheeky altogether, and by and by there would be no holding him in place. A good thrashing might have done some good, but when Curran thought about administering the punishment an uneasy feeling came over him that the fellow might prove more than a match for him. Yes, it was easier to think about than to accomplish.

"Of course he's the very devil of a fighter. 'Most killed two of those prison guards, just with his bare hands. I bet those two big monkey arms of his would come near busting a bear's ribs, let alone a man's, and even if he was whipped he'd be looking all the rest of his life for a chance to get square. But something's got to happen to him or I ain't safe, for he knows too much. Yes, some day I'll have to plug him full of lead in some corner where no one'll ever be able to find him. Who'd have thought he'd ever turn out so rusty after that—that White Rapids business? Wonder if he's got an idea I'm not going to deal square with him?"

The forenoon passed very slowly. The more

Curran thought the shorter grew his temper. Old Nimissuts was pottering around a canoe with the gum-pot, and he thought of going up to him but gave up the idea. At the post he stormed again at old Cyprien and his wife. Then he went down to the river and roared at some Indians who had dropped some fish offal near the landing-place.

"Here! You fellows clean this up! Do you think I'm going to have such an infernal mess around here? Set your kids and women at it, and don't let me catch you doing such things again or you'll see what debt I'll allow you next week when you come whining for provisions to go off hunting with!"

He went among the tents and scolded more, about real or fancied grievances, until the Indians were muttering and casting evil looks in his direction.

Finally one of them, more decided than the rest, went up to him rather truculently. The fellow was a six-footer who could juggle with hundred-pound bags of flour.

"We know what is right, Curran," he said; "we were not through with the cleaning of the

fish. Yellow Hair taught us to keep the place clean and we always do as he said, because he was a man talking to men. Now we shall do as we please, and get our debt from thee, or next year we go down to the Bay, after we have told the men of the brigades. We are weary of thy scolding. Before thy coming a man better than thou was here, and I would he were living and with us now."

Again came to Curran the impulse to knock the man down and trample on him, and once more prudence forbade. In the first place he would probably get badly mauled, because all the others would jump in, and then it was a rather serious business to have all these people turn against him. So he scowled, threateningly, and turned on his heel, going off again towards the river, anxious for any sign of Mashkaugan's return. He was delighted to find that a canoe was in sight.

"But there are three men paddling," he told himself, after a moment's observation. "Wonder where Mashkaugan got the others! But no; that ain't his canoe, it's a long traveling one. Sure enough, it must be that old Father Gregoire."

"Hey!" he shouted to some of the men. "Here is the old Father White Beard returning—the Manitou Ilno of the white man. Burn a little powder, some of you fellows. Show him a welcome! Be on hand to help him land and unload his canoe!"

He had suddenly become very eager to show the old man much attention. A few guns were discharged and the loud detonation of Father Gregoire's ancient fowling-piece resounded.

Presently the good old man landed, leaning on a willing arm and smiling at every one, his kindly, grizzled old face bespeaking his pleasure.

"I am glad to see you all again," he said, "but I can only stay until the morning. I shall have to make a few more stops on my way north and then hurry on to James' Bay, where I am to winter. Already at night I have twice seen the dead waters beginning to film over with ice and I don't want to be frozen in on the road. Now tell me whether there are any little children newly born or people who have died, whose souls are to be prayed for? Any couples awaiting marriage?"

The young woman Ameou had come out of her tent and raised her hands in supplication before the missionary.

"There is one man who is dead and whose soul needs thy praying, O my father! Yellow Hair, my husband, whom the white people called Loveland, is dead far away from here. And—and I have lost my little child, who was baptized by thee. Oh! I beg thee to pray for them, and for me also, for I am stricken with terrible grief!"

He placed his hand on her shoulder, a man of sweet, simple nature, kindly always and ever sharing in the sorrows of others.

"Indeed, my poor daughter, I will pray for them," he assured her, "and also I will pray that thou mayest find comfort and peace in the days to come."

Curran was waiting impatiently. As soon as he could he led the old man into the post building, bidding him sit and rest in the best chair and ordering food to be prepared for him at once.

"Yes, father," he said. "My poor friend has been lost on the way back from the Mukumeshu country. Now I have it in mind that there are

people across the seas, belonging to Loveland, who would be made happy if they could hear that prayers were offered for his soul. It would be a joy for them to get a little paper from your hand, telling them that you have done so, which I will send to those who will mourn for him."

"But I believe that his people are not of our faith," said the priest. "Still, it is likely they will judge there cannot be otherwise than a blessing from the prayers of an old man."

"Yes, they will surely be glad, father. Here is paper and ink. If this pen is now too rusty there are plenty of good wild goose quills. I will fetch thee some."

"No, this will do. Yes, they will know that prayers are prayers, by whomsoever offered, if they arise in earnestness and purity of thought. It will be good if his people may be comforted by the knowledge that we all had kindly thoughts of the one they have lost."

After prolonged searching in the many pockets of his coat the missionary found his spectacles and wrote as follows:

My friend Lawrence Loveland, whom may the Lord have in his keeping, was a very good man whose kindness to all and gentleness of character I had several opportunities of appreciating in the last four years. Also he had greatly endeared himself to the Indians, among whom he took a wife who is now left very desolate, and needs consolation. She is a very good woman. I shall pray for the soul of Loveland and that of his little son, whom I hear is also dead. Also I shall pray that all those he leaves behind may be comforted now and granted the peace everlasting in the greater life to come.

FATHER GREGOIRE.

"Send this paper to the young man's friends," he said. "It will serve a good purpose if in some measure it can lighten their sorrow. And now we will sit down to food, for I am very hungry, but first I will ask the blessing."

They sat down at the table, and Father Gregoire told of some few things he needed for his trip, which Curran promised to have taken to the canoe. But before sitting down Curran folded the paper carefully and locked it up in a small box where he kept a few other papers and small trinkets. It was a good document for him to have, serving,

at least to some extent, as proof of the death of the man and his child. To any but the most prying it must be good corroborative evidence.

Then Curran began to eat, though without much hunger. He was looking at the priest, wanting to speak and yet hesitating.

"The young woman Ameou is now a widow," he finally said, pretending to look away, since, in some wise, it was becoming increasingly difficult for him to look honest people in the face. "She is a fine young woman and now used to better care than she will have among her own people. I—I would be glad to do all I could for her, and—and to acquire the right to look out for her and her father, for the man is growing old and soon cannot hunt any longer. I have spoken to him and he is not averse. In fact, I have always thought a great deal of Ameou and—and I want very much to marry her."

"But this is surely very soon," objected the missionary. "Thou seest how deeply the young woman is still distressed at her loss. I cannot believe that she is also willing, as yet. It might

be that after a year or so—but for the present I would be much surprised if she did such a thing of her own will."

"Oh! You can't judge these savages altogether from the standpoint of white people, father," put in Curran, hurriedly.

"I am not so sure of that," said the priest, very deliberately. "It is now many years since I first began to travel among wild people of many countries, even before I came here, where I expect to end my days, if the Lord be willing. Everywhere, beneath the surface, I have found that manhood and womanhood are much the same in all races. Everywhere there are souls to be saved and suffering to be relieved, and sins that need atonement. I shall speak to the young woman. If she be anxious to marry I will not seek to dissuade her, although we have no great liking for these mingling of white and Indians, because such a marriage might, as thou hast said, be best for her and her old people; yet I must find out the true state of her mind."

He looked at Curran, his eyes and words expressing the authority of his venerable years and

the dignity of his calling, and the agent's gaze fell to the rough table.

"Oh! It is not necessary," he said; "there is plenty of time, of course, and it might be better not to speak just now. Anyway they are going in a day or two. We will wait till next spring. It will be better."

The man saw that again he had made a mistake by being in too great a hurry. What he had thought might perhaps be a help was turning out to be another hindrance. But at any rate he had declared his intention of marrying her, and he vaguely thought that testimony to that effect might serve him. But there was something in the old man's clear eyes that disconcerted him; they seemed to penetrate into his soul and see things that must at any cost remain concealed. Could he read anything of the truth? Did he suspect anything? The man's hand shook a little as he raised his cup to his lips.

The two were now eating in silence, for men who have long dwelt in the wilderness become chary of conversation from the mere lack of practice. The priest was enjoying his food quietly

while Curran often forgot to eat, so troublesome were his thoughts. For some time he had been traveling over a road constantly filled with all sorts of obstructions.

"Yes, I certainly think it might be as well to say nothing to her for the present," he said again, after a time, and Father Gregoire nodded.

The repast was soon ended. Curran had listened unheedingly to the little gossip of other posts the priest had given him from time to time. Usually people crowded around him for news. He was often the first to speak of things that had happened months and months ago, of wars declared, of great events whose echo could only after a long while penetrate such distant places. Father Gregoire arose, after giving thanks, and went out among the tents. An Indian child directed him to the one owned by Nimissuts.

"Peace be with you all," he said to the old chief's wife, who met him at the entrance. "May I come in and speak to the young wife who has been made so desolate?"

He was made welcome, for everyone among the Indians loved him, even those whom he had

not yet been able to gather entirely to his fold. They knew him to be a good man, always eager to help and succor, ready to go far out of his way for such purpose. He had some little knowledge of medicine that was ever at their disposal, and many were the bad hurts he had been able to relieve, or the illnesses that had been benefited through the mysterious agency of his little box of drugs. His advice in all things was also greatly prized.

Ameou had been sitting in the tent, but she arose respectfully when Father Gregoire entered. He had promised, or at least assented to Curran's request not to speak to her of any coming marriage. His purpose was merely to comfort and console.

"Thou art very good to come," she said. "Indeed I have been made happy with the thought of the prayers thou art going to say. It seems to me that thy voice will be heard and thus good will come. Sit here, good father, on this pelt of caribou."

Nimissuts also greeted him, and the young children kept very still and were somewhat awed, for

the priest's long beard was a very wonderful thing, and they knew him to be a man of strange magic and great mysterious powers.

He began to speak to her of Loveland, saying how well he had always thought of her husband, and how wherever he went the Indians had spread about the knowledge that when he was at Tshemuak every one was glad and happy, meeting with fair treatment and justice.

"Ay, there are few men like him," he said; "it will be hard to find another that will be so much liked by all."

"Yes, never will there be another such as he!" exclaimed Ameou. "How can another ever take his place? And now, Father, when he is dead but a few weeks, the man Curran has come to my father and to me, wanting to take me to wife! And the thinking of such a thing drives me mad! If the little one were living I might do such a thing for his sake, as I would give my life for him, because it might help him learn the things his father knew and grow up into a man such as he was. But now there is only the thought of Nimissuts my father, and his wife and small chil-

dren, and I will obey if I must, but I know that death would be a better thing for me!"

The priest shook his head. He had revealed nothing but that which he had wanted to know had come to him without the asking of a question. He remained some time, leaving Ameou quieter and in some peace of mind, going out again to visit the other tents and give good counsel. The people had a great deal to say about all that had happened, and he listened in silence.

He had to wait until the next day, for one or two ribs of his canoe needed mending, and a small leak had to be stopped, besides which his two guides had worked hard and needed some rest. So in the evening, after supper, he went again to see Ameou. The interior of the tent was dark, for the night was falling fast. He found the young woman sobbing bitterly, for the thoughts of her lost happiness had returned. He placed his hand upon her shoulder.

"I want to hear all that has happened," he told her. "I want to hear everything, that I may the better be able to advise thee. But I will say now that thy marrying of Curran, unless the

wish to do so was in thy heart, would be a very wrong and shameful thing which I would not have a hand in. Now tell me all."

The words came very slowly at first, and he listened at first gravely. In his travels much that was unsavory had been told him about Curran, and in some way a suspicion, very faint and scarcely believable, had entered his mind. He vaguely felt that something was wrong, having been impressed by some lack of candor in the agent's manner or speech.

Ameou's tale came very slowly at first. She began by speaking of the contemplated trip, and how all said that it was foolish, for many knew the country and were aware that the parts to be explored were worthless. No one could explain the sending of a man on such a journey. But this she mentioned briefly. Her heart was near to breaking when she spoke of all her hopes of the homecoming of her man and when she told of the joy that had come to her with the birth of her baby Yellow Hair, who had features that pictured the father's. Then she related how the news had come of the awful disaster in the White Rapids,

and how the child had disappeared and all had joined in a vain quest for it.

"Oh! Father!" she cried, with hands clasped tightly before. "Thou art the Manitou Ilno of the white people, and when thou speakest to thy Manitou thy words are often answered—thou hast said so. So I beg of thee to speak to Him now. Ask of Him to be kind and good to the spirit of Uapishiu Yellow Hair—say also that his name is Lawrence Loveland, that there may be no error. And—and ask him to give me back my little one if he be still living, or to tell me where his body lies, so that I may go and weep over it!"

She knelt imploringly before him, whereat the others also knelt in silence. Nimissuts listened, profoundly impressed, and the wife and children also listened in wonder, holding their breaths, awed because they felt that something very amazing was about to happen.

The old missionary's voice rose in rapid, passionate utterance for the dead and in lower, gentler words of consolation for the living. After this came more broken, halting sentences, in which the priest implored mercy for the poor shattered reed

at his feet and humbly begged divine compassion whereby her terrible burden might be made lighter.

Finally the priest's spoken prayers were ended, yet his thin blue-veined hands were still joined together and his lips moved.

And then, suddenly, just outside the tent, beside the open flap, the subdued wailing cry of a little infant was heard. The opening was shadowed by the form of a man, with a great pair of shoulders surmounted by a deeply inset head, all darkly limned against the rising glow of the soft moonlight shining from a sky that had cleared of all cloudiness.

CHAPTER XXII

A HEART RELIEVED

All the people in the tent had looked up, wondering. Ameou's heart was beating fast, with a sudden instinct that something wonderful was happening.

The man came in, bearing something in his long arms, holding it very cautiously.

"Here, woman," he said, "is thy child that was lost. Take it in thy arms, carefully, for he sleeps and never awoke as I brought him. There is nothing amiss with him; he has been well cared for, and a good woman fed him so that he is not weakened with hunger. And now that he has safely reached thee I will say that I have a message for thee, which thou must hear."

But Ameou had never listened. There had come from her a wild cry, a swift though staggering rising to her feet, during which the priest helped her, and she flung herself upon the man to recover her treasure.

Her shapely head bent over the precious thing, whose face became moist with the tears of joy she was shedding. She pressed the tiny form to the bosom that had suffered such cruel agony and to the heart that had been so overburdened.

Mashkaugan was pressed for time; he would have spoken and yet felt compelled to remain silent, as did all the others, who were standing around, filled with the deepest wonder. They were amazed at the swift answer that had been vouchsafed to the missionary's beseeching words, never doubting for a moment that they had brought about the child's immediate arrival.

At last Ameou looked up with a deep sigh of happy relief. In spite of certain words which, in a moment of despair, she had uttered before her father and Curran, the baby was again the most precious thing in the world to her.

"Where didst thou find my child, Mashkaugan?" she asked. "I shall ever be grateful to thee and will never forget thy great goodness. Anything that is mine thou canst have for this, and I will part with it gladly to thee."

"I want nothing," he said, quickly. "The

child was found at the place where thou and I were searching, but of this I will tell thee later. Now I want to say at once that I bear a message for thee, from one who is very ill and in whom thou art greatly concerned. At once thou must make ready to follow me, even though it be night. We go to Many Beaver at once. Take the baby and come!"

"But there is no one in the world in whom I am concerned," she protested. "Now my little one is back. He is all that I care for. There is no one else on earth!"

"There is one, Ameou," repeated the hunchback, hoarsely. "It is one whose lips have touched those of this little child of thine, and now he bids thee come at once, for at all times in his great sickness he is crying out for thee and despairing because thou art not near. Indeed it is a man thou hast thought dead, who has come back to life!"

The man made a swift move forward and caught the young woman, clapping his great hand on her mouth.

"Nay! Do not cry out! In silence must thou

come. We must make ready to go at once, for I fear I shall travel but slowly, having done all I could to come here swiftly that the child might the sooner rest on thy breast. I will do my best, however, though I am nearly spent with weariness."

"My two young men are well rested now," said Father Gregoire. "If the man is so ill he needs me to care for him also. We will start in my canoe, which is a long one fit to carry a good load. I can also use the paddle and we will go much faster than with a single man at work. Get ready as this man has said, Ameou. I will at once return with my two lads, strong men both."

Thus a very few minutes later they were afloat upon the river, that was now placid and unruffled, and paddling down the scintillating path of the moon-rays.

For a short time Mashkaugan rested quietly in the canoe, like one who knows he has done all that may be asked of the thews of a strong man; but in a short time he felt strong again and took up a paddle, to which the long canoe at once responded with greater speed.

In the meanwhile Ameou was kneeling in the bow, close to the strongly upturned stem, with the precious little bundle of humanity lying before her, comfortably ensconced in the narrowing point. She was also paddling with a magnificent sweep of her arms, while behind her the missionary, the hunchback and the two men followed her stroke.

The canoe dashed ahead so fast that the thwarts were groaning against the long bindings of spruce roots, and the thin cedar ribs cracked while the birch-bark skin complained. The breaths of the strong men began to come out in sobbing grunts, as when woodsmen smite with all their strength with the heavy axe.

Therefore they heard nothing of the splashing of muskrats or the occasional sharp sad cries of night-birds; none of the soft whispering of the gentle breeze through the reeds of the dead waters. The rapids were easy ones and the craft flew over them, lifting, sinking again and flying on, until the river leading to Many Beaver was reached. Here the opposing current slowed them down and the waters purled harder on the bow and along the sides, but they never slackened

their efforts. The narrower waters were nearly everywhere in deepest shadow caused by the heavy growth on the borders, but through this darkness they went on, unerringly, as the shores seemed to run towards them and pass by.

Overhead, high up in the air, a belated triangle of geese passed in rapid flight, bound for the warmer lands to the south, but only the clangor of their voices told of their going. A great horned owl sitting on a limb overhanging the water took flight in soundless hurry, like a fleeing shadow. Before the canoe at times rose bewildered ducks, squawking in terror, and in the path of the moon muskrats drew long thin marks on the water, diving suddenly.

At last they came near the outlet of the lake, where they were compelled to slow down for a moment. At this point the river curved sharply and the canoe grated gently over the sand-bar that half blocked the current, but a second later it was in deep water again, among big pads of lilies, whence they issued out on the broad surface of the lake.

The opposite shore was dim, a mere outline of

darkness ridging the moon-lit water, but far away there was a tiny point of light towards which they steered, again going faster, like racers nearing the goal.

"'Twill be a journey to be remembered, albeit a short one," gasped one of the priest's men, a moment before they landed, as the paddles struck the water more slowly. "We have traveled through the water as *Uapisk*, the wild-goose, was winging her way through the sky, a short time ago."

They had reached the place of Atuk's fishing camp, where burned a small fire before the tent, which had guided them, and they cautiously ran the canoe up on the beach, close to some high boulders. Leaping out, the men turned the canoe alongside, and after all had stepped out bore it up and turned it over. Ameou had leaped out, trembling and exhausted, with her baby, and Mashkaugan helped her up the path towards the tent that was half-concealed among the firs and spruces.

"At first we will wait here," said Father Gregoire to his men. "Too many mourners are bad

in sorrow, too many witnesses also in happiness. We will pray here that the sick man may become well again, and then ye two can light your pipes. You have done well. Soon I will go up and see whether there is anything I can do for this man who is ill. Get me my little box of medicines from my pack."

In the meanwhile Ameou had entered the tent, where Atuk the Nascaupee held up a small torch that she might see the man who was tossing upon the blankets resting on balsam boughs.

She never heeded, perhaps she never saw the long tangled hair or the straggling beard, nor the thin face that was so worn with suffering. She bent over and kissed it tenderly and reverently, like some holy relic to be worshipped.

"Ameou! Ameou! My wife! Why do you keep her away?" cried Loveland in anguish, without appearing to see her.

"I am here, at thy side, Yellow Hair!" she said, softly.

At this the man's eyes opened and he looked at her, blissfully.

"I—I had such evil dreams—thou—thou wert

being taken away—away from me," he gasped, hoarsely.

"I am with thee now, Yellow Hair—never to leave thee again," she answered.

Then Loveland smiled at her, contentedly, as if all pain and suffering were things of the past. It is possible that at this moment all memories of his long absence were blotted out from his mind. It was as if he had never left home, and his head, uplifted for a moment, fell back in peaceful sleep, while she watched him and fear came to her again, lest she had found him only to lose him soon. And yet it had been a wondrous joy to see him living, to hear him call for her, to know that in his dreams his love for her was supreme.

In a short time Father Gregoire came up, leaving his two men to put up his tent near at hand and unroll his blankets. He entered, greeted pleasantly though in whispers by Atuk's wife, and examined the patient as best he knew how. He had little knowledge but vast experience. The red flush upon the cheeks and the fast breathing told him a tale of inflamed lungs. He measured

out some medicine and administered it, giving directions for its further use, and sat down quietly on the ground, close to the couch, where his presence comforted and gave hope to the sorely tried young wife. After a while the old man, overcome with fatigue, began to nod and fell asleep. A deep silence reigned, broken only by Loveland's labored respirations. Mashkaugan crouched near, his limbs sore, his body worn with fatigue, but sleep never came to him. His mind was quiet now. A meed of peace had come to it that was a new thing in his life. Punishment would doubtless be dealt to him for his misdeeds, but that was nothing. He would bear it easily now, considering it but as the paying of a just debt.

And so the long night wore on. Ameou wakeful at all times, the priest dozing in the sudden and easy sleep of old age and awakening just as readily, when he would bend over his patient again, watchfully, to rest once more for a few minutes.

Atuk and his wife, as well as the children, slumbered peacefully. Since the Manitou Ilno was there everything would go well. Once or

twice little Yellow Hair cried, for an instant, to be instantly pacified by his mother. And then the sky lightened in the east, and the strong breeze of early morning came and ruffled the lake while the sun rose in majestic crimson over the edge of the unending forest.

After this came several days, in which more than once there was something like despair, followed by hopefulness. Atuk and his wife continued to gather fish, and their little children played about the camp, silent and well-behaved as is usual with their kind. During the day Mashkaugan threw himself down, anywhere, on the hard round stones of the beach, leaning against a boulder, sitting beside the fire near the camp, and slept at times, fitfully, but during the long nights he watched all the time, with never the closing of an eye.

Came another day when Loveland was very weak and delirious, with a raging fever, and babbled unceasingly, while the others looked on with heavy hearts. But presently his brow looked to be dotted with drops of water, whereat Father Gregoire joined his hands in thanksgiving. The

wild talking stopped, and the hot dry skin became moist, and soon Loveland was sleeping quietly, with the breathing coming easily and more slowly.

"My daughter!" said Father Gregoire. "I hardly dare say so as yet, but I am thinking that Heaven has heard our prayers and blessed our endeavors to heal thy husband!"

During all this time she had been dry-eyed, showing little sign either of her grief or of the joy that came at the slightest improvement, but now she began to weep, casting herself at the old man's feet, in thankfulness.

CHAPTER XXIII

FOES IN DARKNESS

On the evening of the departure of Ameou and Father Gregoire for Many Beaver Lake the chief agent was turning over the pages of an old magazine, but although his eyes ran down the lines he made out little meaning from the words, his thoughts constantly wandering away. Finally, with an oath, he hurled the book angrily across the room. In a city such an action would merely represent impatience; in the wilderness it was utter recklessness, for there the printed word is of the greatest value and is treated with the utmost respect. It is a link with lands beyond reach, an opportunity for hearing the wisdom or folly of other men's minds, a surcease from the carking routine of days when the deprivation of ordinary human intercourse weighs heavily upon the man who hungers for a new face, for a voice speaking in tones unfamiliar and hence welcome. The oft

read love-story brings back memories of ancient longings, of a laughter that was balm to the heart. The other tales evoke images of crowded cities, of country lanes with purling brooks, of old farms wherein perhaps live yet the old people from whose nest the venturesome one has flown. The very advertisements represent the busy, humming, toiling life that has been forsaken for the stillness of the deserted wilds.

"I wonder what the devil that old sky-pilot is doing with himself?" he asked. "Suppose he's turned into his old tent instead of coming here. He knew the room was fixed for him. He should have come in and gone to bed long ago. Like as not he's found some Indian kid with a stomach-ache and is sitting up with him. Old chap's crazy!"

He consulted his watch—the only one within a radius of many hundred miles, and whose accuracy was more than doubtful, though it served to mark the passing of hours.

"Eleven o'clock. Hanged if I'm going to wait up for him any longer. He can come in or stay out. I'll turn in."

He had gone to his room and cast off his coat, which fell on the floor, when he made up his mind that he had better take a turn outside. He wasn't sleepy anyway. It didn't seem to him that he had been able to sleep since ever so long. He was going to see for himself whether he could find an explanation for the priest's continued absence. The old chap had looked queerly at him. Was he getting any queer notion in his old bald head?

He lit his pipe and opened the door, looking out suspiciously. But absolute silence reigned among the tents he dimly saw among the trees. For some minutes he listened, trying to make out some human utterances such as would carry far in the still night, but he heard nothing.

Then he went towards the tent of the old chief, his soft moccasins making no sound; but somewhere a dog began to growl. He came nearer, however, but the ample snore of the old man assured him that the inmates were sleeping. Curran took off his cap and scratched his head.

"There's something queer," he muttered, and moved off towards the landing place where a number of canoes were pulled up on the shore and

turned over. In the moonlight they were very distinct and easy to recognize. For a moment he searched among them but could find no sign of the missionary's four fathom craft. The man then uttered a curse.

"He's gone, the old cuss! That was a great trick to play on me. I suppose that after all he sneaked off to that girl and made her talk. Got everything out of her, he did, sure as I'm standing here, the old rascal; and then he told her he didn't approve of the marriage and now everything'll be off. Some day I'm going to get square with him for sticking in his oar that way! Then he just went off, and of course he's told her that no Indian marriage would be any good. They're always interfering. Well, it don't matter. I'll square it up with Nimissuts in the spring, if I've got to give him all the truck in the post, and I'll take her south and marry her there. Seems funny he should start at night. Never heard of such a thing. He couldn't go very far, anyway."

So he returned to the post where he took a drink from his bottle of diluted alcohol before he sought his bunk and began a restless tossing that

lasted all night, although in the small hours he finally obtained a little fitful sleep and awakened a good deal later than usual.

He clamored for his breakfast, and when old man Cyprien brought it to him he began to ask questions.

"You don't know! Why don't you know, you old fool? Go out and find out when White Beard, the Manitou Ilno, went away, and why he started so late. No, never mind, I'll go myself. That coffee's rotten, but give me another cup."

"I saw this morning that the canoe was no longer at the landing," said Cyprien, pouring out the coffee. "Yet he cannot have gone for a long time, because he was to take some flour and *kukush*, the meat of pigs. He cannot go away to the great water in the north without more provisions, for his are nearly gone. Therefore he will be back soon."

"That is so," assented Curran. "I laid out all the stuff for him on the floor of the storeroom."

He rose to investigate at once and found that the provisions were still there, untouched.

"Well, he isn't gone for good yet, so he intends

to come back soon, that's sure. Wonder what kind of a dodge he's up to now?"

Curran also made inquiries about Mashkaugan but no one had seen him. He decided to go and question Nimissuts but the old man hadn't come out of his tent and it was perhaps better to keep away for the moment. No telling what that girl would blurt out to him. Like enough she was still as mad as a hornet. 'Twas better to leave them alone when they were in their tantrums.

He strolled back to the post, where he walked up and down for a time. Then he came out again and asked for Nimissuts but was told the old man had taken his gun and gone out on the barrens to look for a caribou.

"That don't look as if he was getting ready to go off to-day or even to-morrow," he commented. "That's funny. Thought he was in a sweat to be off to his hunting grounds. Thought better of it, I suppose. He's got plenty of time yet. 'Twas Ameou prodded him to go right off. Maybe she's changed her mind."

After this several days went by, during which Curran made rather large inroads on his supply

of strong drink. He began to fret and fume because the old priest was not returning. He watched long and often, but never saw Ameou.

"Reckon she's gone and got sick. That's why they haven't started yet. And that devil Mashkaugan still away; it beats me. Wonder if he's gone off and made away with himself, with all his crazy superstitions. Hope he has, or that he's broken his neck somewhere. 'Twould be a great riddance of bad rubbish. Wish he'd never turn up. Like enough he won't; thinks the devils are still chasing him!"

Wandering over to the landing he counted the canoes there. Ten of them in all. Yes, there had been ten right along. No! There had been nine, until Father Gregoire had come, and then the priest had gone away and there were still ten. That was queer!

A peculiar mark on one of them attracted his attention. It had been there for a number of days, sure enough, and looked like most of the others, so that he had paid no special attention to it. Besides, he had plenty of other things to think about. Curran turned it over. There was

not the slightest doubt. It was Mashkaugan's!

The agent looked about him, sorely puzzled. An Indian squaw was coming down to the waterside, bearing a couple of old pots she wanted to clean.

"Say, Pileshish, how long's Mashkaugan's canoe been here?" he asked her. "D'you know when he came, and where he's gone to?"

The woman looked at him in surprise. To her these white men were sometimes beyond comprehension. The canoe had been there six days in all. Any Indian who had seen it once would have been able to recognize it immediately. Bark canoes are never more alike than any other individual works of art. No two are ever exactly similar, any more than any two men's faces. It took but a glance to tell the difference, and this man Curran had never noticed it. Such blindness was amazing; the merest child could have told him. She had put down her kettles and lifted one hand and the thumb of the other.

"That many days," she said. "Time when Mashkaugan came here in the night, for when we

went to sleep the canoe was not there, and we saw it when we rose."

"And you saw him?"

"No see him," she replied. "Heard a noise. People moving about. Then all quiet. Canoe gone and canoe come back, so Mashkaugan here, that's all."

She shrugged her shoulders and knelt down, scooping out a handful of sand wherewith to scour her pots, while Curran dashed off to the old chief's tent. It suddenly struck him as queer, after all, that he had seen nothing of Ameou for such a long time. If she had been ill the woman of Nimissuts would have come for some medicine. The Indians had great faith in the white man's drugs. Formerly Ameou was always pottering around the tent, over the cooking fire, or busy with some of the endless jobs Indian women always have waiting for them. He must find out all about her. Nimissuts also had been out of the way most of the time.

On this occasion he laid aside the usual formality of asking for admittance and walked right in. He found that the old chief had just returned

with some hares, which the wife was occupied in skinning. The children also were in the tent but there was no sign of the young woman.

"Where's your daughter gone to?" he demanded harshly.

The old man slowly pulled his pipe out of his mouth and pointed to the north with his thumb.

"Gone away with White Beard, the Manitou Ilno," he answered very deliberately.

Curran flared up. Evidently this was a conspiracy to take the girl out of his reach.

"Why didn't you tell me of this," he demanded, furiously. "What did you allow her to run away for? What have you been hiding from me?"

"I hide nothing," replied Nimissuts. "You never asked me."

Curran swore loudly, so that the children cowered in fear.

"Where have they gone? What do you know about all this? If you've been trying to play any dirty tricks on me you'll go hungry this winter. Not a pound of flour can you get, and it's too late for you to go to another post for it. You'll just take up your tent and your women and the brats

and get out of here. You knew I wanted Ameou for my wife and now you've gone and sent her away, have you? You're going to have to deal with me, now!"

He hammered the palm of his left hand with his fist, raging, so that the children ran out of the tent, but the woman glared at him, reaching for the gun that stood in a corner, near at hand. Old Nimissuts, however, looked at him quietly, his serene and wrinkled face displaying not the slightest trace of emotion.

"Gone to camp of Atuk, the Nascaupee, on Many Beaver Lake," he said. "Gone now five, six days," he answered. "Go look see, if you want to."

But Curran had already dashed out of the tent, shouting:

"Here, Akitamek! Kaku! Hustle along here. Get my canoe ready at once and take new strong paddles! Run along to the post and get bread and meat and tea for a day or two, with blankets. Never mind the cooking things, we're going where we can borrow some. Hurry along and don't keep me waiting or I'll pull the pelts off you!"

He ran to the post building, yelling out orders to old Cyprien. From his room he took a heavy pistol which he stuck in his hip-pocket. He was mad all through; all ideas of prudence had gone; these people were conspiring against him, in some way, and some one was going to get hurt if there was any crooked business!

There is no man so indignant over ill conduct on the part of others as the one who is thoroughly unscrupulous in his own dealings.

"I'll see if any of these chaps are playing dog's tricks on me," he swore. "I've been too easy with 'em! They've got to find out who they're dealing with, or get holes punched into 'em!" he exclaimed. "Something's got to be done and I'm going to do it and no mistake!"

In a few minutes everything was ready. He entered the canoe and also took a paddle. As a rule he considered it beneath his dignity to work when there were men to do the sweating for him. A chief agent must maintain his authority by appearing to be a superior being; but now he was in a desperate hurry. As soon as it was afloat the canoe went off at a good pace, propelled by three

strong men. The Indians seemed to work more easily than the agent, doubtless because they labored more effectively. But Curran was not satisfied with the speed and kept urging them on, unceasingly.

"You men get too confoundedly lazy," he yelled at them. "You don't do a thing all summer but sit around the post, smoking your pipes. I could have taken your squaws and got a better gait out of 'em. Work harder, d'ye hear me? Shove her along!"

But the two Indians made no reply and their faces remained impassive. In spite of this, however, such a speech as this offended them deeply, though they maintained their silence and even made a show of urging the canoe to greater speed.

Curran was too excited to notice the fact that while they seemed to bend harder to their toil the strokes certainly grew less efficient and the canoe distinctly lost headway. He had yet to discover that the natives are flies hard to catch with vinegar.

It took them all of two hours to reach Many Beaver Lake. Atuk's camp was not visible from

the outlet, and no smoke arose on the opposite shore to show the exact point of its location. Curran only knew it hazily, and did not guess that the men could have gone straight to it in the dark. They simply crossed over and began traveling up the shore, for the mere joy of a few minutes' delay that was a bit of revenge for his abuse.

Presently one of them sniffed like a moose scenting an enemy and pointed ahead, while the other grunted in assent. Curran stared but saw nothing; but he knew the ability of the Indians to smell out the slightest wisp of smoke, or to see it far beyond the limits of the white man's vision. They were passing the fallen birch lying on the shore, to the further side of the growth of reeds. A few of these had yet failed to straighten out, and the man thought angrily of his useless search and of Scarface's deception.

A few minutes later, after rounding a small point, they came in sight of the camp. The man Atuk had seen them coming and stood on the beach, grunting out a surly *Quey, quey*, to which Curran vouchsafed no answer. He jumped out

and ran up the path. The first person he met was Father Gregoire, who was pacing up the little cleared space in front of the tent, reading his breviary. The missionary, seeing him, closed the book and came towards him, smilingly, but the agent's approach was altogether truculent. He was going to have it out!

"I am glad that you have come," said the priest, pleasantly. "I have good news for you, for I suppose you have heard nothing as yet. We are all rejoicing over many blessings. The man we had thought dead is becoming well again. He has been very ill, so ill that for a day or two I despaired of his recovery. It looks to me as if you were angry over something, but I know you will dismiss all resentment when you discover what happiness lies before us all, and you will join us in giving thanks. This is a Sunday marked with felicity for us all and our hearts must hold nothing but gratitude."

"What's all that stuff and nonsense?" interrupted Curran, brutally. "I've come here to know what the devil you've done with that girl. I won't stand any fooling."

"The young woman has met with great happiness. The Lord has been full of kindness to her," answered the priest, quietly, "and she is deeply grateful. The manner of your speech is scarcely becoming, but I will let that pass. Of course there can be no more question of your . . ."

But Curran no longer heeded him. In his exasperation he roughly pushed the old man to one side and dashed up to the tent, throwing the flap wide open. For an instant he recoiled, for he was faced by Mashkaugan who placed one of his long, gnarled hands on the agent's breast and held him back.

"Thy place is not here," said the hunchback. "Keep away!"

The chief agent grasped him and would have flung him aside, but he could hardly budge the half-breed. Father Gregoire, who had swiftly followed, also laid a powerful hand on Curran's shoulder.

"Peace!" he said, gravely. "I will not have any brawling on this day, which is to be kept holy. Loosen your hold, men! I order that you keep peace among you. Mashkaugan, stand thou

back! And thou, Curran, come outside and tell me the purpose of thy coming, after which thou canst go in and join in our rejoicing."

Mashkaugan had drawn to one side but Curran, disregarding the priest, took a step forward, glancing furiously at the old missionary and the hunchback.

But when he was inside the tent and his eyes fell on its occupants he remained like a man transfixed by an arrow, or as one lost in a blizzard who has leaned upon a tree and there been frozen stiff and stark. His mouth was open, his eyes glared, fixedly.

CHAPTER XXIV

LA POINTE AU MÉCHANT

The priest's words had been suggestive and clear enough. A man in his right mind would have instantly understood their full meaning, and known that they revealed the return of Loveland and the rescue of the baby.

But he had been speaking to a man driven at least partly out of his mind by chagrin and dismay, by vague fears and suspicions as well as by the abuse of drink and the lack of sleep. To Curran the missionary's speech had represented some kind of insignificant drivel, a stupid effort to detain him in his vengeance, and with a rough motion of his hand he had swept him away and sent him stumbling to the ground. And now he was in the tent, rather dim after the bright sunlight outside, and his pupils dilated as he searched the interior.

Loveland had been lying down, still extremely

weak, but at the sound of scuffling he had raised himself upon one elbow. He had recognized Curran's voice. It was not that of a friend, of a dear companion of long months, but it was familiar, something that brought him back to former days, that helped the sense of joy a man who has been dying feels at being alive again.

But suddenly his face was revealed to the chief agent's stare. The thin drawn features appeared for all the world like those of some corpse that has been raised from the tomb, and that in spite of the faint smile of recognition that was upon them. For a moment the man's heart grew faint and cold within him and a nervous trembling shook his frame as he glared on. And then a great fear possessed him. The victim of his plots was there, ready to accuse and denounce him, to call him a murderer, to ask for vengeance upon him. He looked about him, wildly, as if searching an avenue of escape, and his eyes fell upon Loveland's wife, who was sitting at the foot of the couch with her child pressed to her bosom. Only that morning, at the break of day, the priest had told her that her man would live, that the crisis

was past, that strength would return. Her heart was now full of gladness; nothing that had happened mattered now; life in its greatness was before her. The priest had spoken of the remission of sins, of the forgiveness of debts, and she was ready to condone. She had heard the man's harsh words. Surely, at the sight of Loveland, whose death he had so loudly deplored, calling him his best and dearest friend, the agent would be instantly quieted and glad to grasp his hand. And so, in her contentment, she found it in her heart to smile, but in his excitement Curran translated this into a grin of triumph over him, into an expression of malicious joy at his defeat. And then the terror that had first seized him gave way to fierce resentment, to a furious desire for a revenge that would crush others, since they had brought about the failure of his infamous schemes. Everything had gone by the board! The plans so carefully worked out, over which he had worried so deeply and fretted so continuously, were now being met by shattering disaster! And now, forsooth, they were laughing at him, grinning over his abasement, mocking at his fury!

"So, you've all been plotting against me!" he raged. "You've been trying to make a fool of me, have you? Reckon you wanted my job at Tshemuak, didn't you? And so you'll be telling the Company a lot of lies about me! You'll pretend to believe all that Mashkaugan's inventing about me. Thought to have me fired, eh? But you can't prove anything against me, damn you! I tell you they won't believe your dirty lies! And you think I can be laughed at, and spurned! You think every filthy Indian around this country's going to be able to give me his infernal cheek! They've been at it already, but I'll show 'em! So Mashkaugan's been blabbing, has he? It's his own neck that'll get stretched, if I don't do for him first! Where's the stinking, crooked brute? I'll settle with him first, I will. I'll show him if he can tell lies about me!"

He dashed furiously out of the tent, seeing red, his features distorted with wrath, his eyes bloodshot and glaring like those of some hound gone mad.

At the door he met the old missionary, who clutched his coat and sought to hold him.

"Peace! Keep still, I command you! Here! What on earth is the matter?" cried the priest.

But in an instant Curran had shaken him off, paying not the slightest attention to him. A fixed idea was in his disordered brain. Mashkaugan had been the one to play Judas, to betray him. The man was standing at some little distance, with folded arms, because the priest must be obeyed.

"I'll have no fighting," cried the old man. "Throw away that knife, Mashkaugan. Run away from him until we can seize him and quiet him. He's mad, I tell you. Help there! You men by the canoes. Hasten up, Atuk!"

The three who had been down by the canoes scrambled up breathlessly as Mashkaugan turned away, in immediate obedience to the priest's commands, but for which he would have eagerly held his ground. He flung his knife away as he covered the ground with wonderful speed, turning his head to watch his pursuer and paying little heed to where he went. But the infuriated man was outstripping him and getting very close, while the rest came running after, panting.

A few seconds later Mashkaugan found himself on the great ledge of rock which overhung the water, at the end of the point. He could go no further and turned at bay like a boar before hounds. A second later Curran had flung himself upon him and they grappled like two wild beasts, gasping like bull moose in deadly fight. The lust of battle was upon them, the fierce joy of the man gone back to the primitive, heedless of pain, seeking to rend the foe. As they tore at one another they snarled and grunted with the power of their blows, with the violent effort to slay. For an instant one of the agent's hands became free of the hunchback's grasp. Something gleamed in his hand and there was an explosion.

There was another brief second during which Mashkaugan's hold seemed to become relaxed. His face whitened and he swayed, as if stunned, but all at once one of his long arms went back to shoot forth again with lightning speed. The massive fist met the enemy's lower jaw with a thudding crash. The chief agent's hands suddenly dropped to his side, the pistol falling to the ground. Then slowly his body seemed to col-

lapse, the legs giving way as do those of an ox that has been pole-axed, and the whole frame sank limp and lifeless. It dropped on an inclined bit of rock and, before the running men could reach it, slowly and inertly slipped from the shelving cliff into the deep, dark water at its foot. There was a tremendous splash, an upshooting of spray, great ripples circling away—and then, as the eager watchers stared from above, the water smoothed over, slowly, as if to cast a veil over all evidence of men's blind fury.

At once the Indians ran down to their canoes and paddled desperately towards the point. Here, for a long time, they searched with their long setting poles, that proved too short to reach the bottom. Then they let down a rope made of tump-lines, bearing a heavy hooked branch of water-logged wood, but their efforts were unavailing. Such work was by no means to their liking and they stopped their search very soon, fearing the spirits that gather about the places of sudden death, and returned ashore, running up to where Mashkaugan was lying upon the ground with the priest kneeling in prayer at his side. At first they

thought he had passed away, but soon they found that he was still breathing and gently bore him to the tent, where they put him down carefully upon a bed of balsam. The eyes were closed, the lips very pale and bloodless, and the missionary knelt again, opening the shirt over the great deformed breast whose mossy surface showed a great splash of blood. As best he could he dressed the wound, while tears came from his eyes, for neither the years nor his great experience of suffering had affected the softness of his heart.

"Oh! the poor man," he cried. "I—I did it for the best—I should not have prevented him from defending himself at once—I was hoping that . . ."

But Mashkaugan's eyes opened and a smile came to his lips.

"It may be for the best, my father," he said in a whispering, halting voice. "I—I shall not die at—at once. There is time—time to speak to thee—I want to tell of my many sins, though—though I fear they can never—be forgiven. Come nearer—put thy ear to my lips—I can speak but low. The breathing comes hard."

"It may be best to wait a little," suggested the priest. "Thou art very weak now. In a short while, maybe . . ."

"No, listen to me now or—or there may not be time."

And so the old man listened to the whispered words, while the others stood at a distance, respectfully watching through the opened flap of the tent, with their caps held in their hands. For some minutes the slow words that were hurting continued to come. After a time they ceased. The old man looked very grave and sad. His hands were joined together and he looked up as if seeking for guidance from on high. When his eyes fell again he saw Mashkaugan's hand lifted, slowly, and drawn from brow to breast and shoulders, in the sign he had abandoned since the days of early childhood.

"Thy repentance is very great and true, Mashkaugan," he said in a quavering voice. "May the Lord's mercy fall upon thee and ease thy spirit. I shall give thee absolution."

After this there were long minutes of silence, during which the breaths came shallow and pain-

ful. But after a time the hunchback's eyes opened again and he whispered once more.

"Lift me—lift me close to Loveland," he asked.

When they had put him near the young man's couch Mashkaugan's head turned.

"Uapishiu! Yellow Hair! I—I sought to kill thee—thou knowest all—and now I—I love thee greatly and—and beg thy forgiveness again!"

"Indeed I forgive thee all, Mashkaugan," said the sick man. "I have much to thank thee for on account of thy goodness for these days that have just passed. I would give anything to know that some day thou and I might travel again together, eating and sleeping like two friends, in the greatness of the big woods! I shall pray that thou mayest get well again so that we can many times clasp our hands in friendship."

His pale, weak hand went out and met the other, and the hunchback smiled at him, gratefully, and spoke in a stronger voice.

"Now I feel that I am forgiven of God and man," he said. "I am happy, and—and there will be happiness in—in lying over there by—by

the two great birches that—that overlook the point. They—they see the glory of every rising sun. I—I have received much good in return for great evil."

Then he closed his eyes again, and all were silent and very sad. The two women thought of how devotedly he had watched Loveland, night after night, and the men were impressed by sorrow that so fine a woodsman and great a hunter should be laid low, after a fight so heroic. It looked as if he could live but very little longer, and they moved about very silently, going far off for their provision of wood, that the strokes of the axes might not disturb.

But on the next day, by what Father Gregoire was disposed to consider a miracle, he was still living, though it yet seemed that he must soon be buried beneath the silvery trees. But another day passed and yet another, and finally he began to get better, slowly, thanks to the good care he received and the wonderful strength that was in his great distorted body.

The priest's two men had been sent to Tshe-

muak Post, whence they brought back provisions, that were getting scarce, after spreading the wonderful news that Uapishiu Yellow Hair was living and would soon return. When they spoke of Curran's death it is to be feared that no one expressed sorrow.

"Now Uapishiu will be among us again, a good man who has become one of us and who speaks the truth," they commented, as the canoe departed again.

Finally, on a fine day, when Many Beaver was becoming filmed with the young ice after a strong frost, the canoes started from Atuk's camp, in procession, and reached the outlet down the river and into the Tshemuak, where they paddled strongly against the current. It was evident that at the post people were watching, for no sooner were the canoes in sight than the long-barreled guns began to burn much valuable black *pok*, the detonations reverberating among the hills in long rolling peals, in honor of the little fleet bearing Loveland and his beautiful wife, who held the little child, and Father Gregoire and his men, and the family

of Atuk, who would never again camp on Many Beaver.

Indeed, no man was ever known to stretch his nets for whitefish, much less to put up his tent, anywhere near the place on the little lake that is now well known as "La Pointe au Méchant," the Bad Man Point. Even the canoes which travel up and down on their way to the big Mukumeshu country, instead of hugging the southern shore, as formerly, take to the northern one that gives a half-mile more of paddling. It is supposed to be the wiser course, for one can never know.

Father Gregoire, to his regret, which was great, at least for a few days, had to give up his contemplated wintering at the great Bay. The winter was coming too fast to permit of safe journeying so far north, for many lakes and dead-waters up there must already be hard frozen over.

When Loveland finally discovered, at the coming of the first spring brigade, that a great deal of money was awaiting him in England, he was rather puzzled in regard to its disposal. In the summer he went abroad, where his sister's urgings

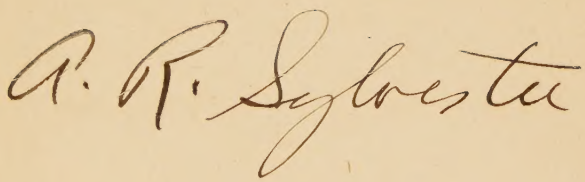
did not prevent his leaving as soon as matters were adjusted. He amply supplied her needs, for she had a large family to bring up and educate, and returned at the earliest possible day, for his heart was in the beautiful great wilderness of the *Grand Nord*. The share he kept for himself will come handy when his boys are grown up and need some learning.

Several years have passed since the events we have just related took place. Loveland has been promoted to a more important post quite close to civilization. In fact, a daily train passes within a few hundred yards of his door. There is a parson and a doctor in the place, and a big saw-mill with many workers. By the edge of the lake many Indians camp, in the summer, and think the world of Uapishiu. Ameou is greatly beloved. By this time she is matronly, and her children all show traces of her husband's fair locks. She is still a woman of great beauty, with whom time has dealt with in a manner more kindly than usually happens with those of her race. There is something very strong and fine in the sweetness and repose of her face.

Gradually Loveland is accumulating many books; the cultured instincts developed in his early life can have full sway, so that he is able to combine the happiness that comes from intercourse with great minds with that derived from the greatness and the freedom of a far country, in which problems are easily solved by men of strength and courage, and which bids fair to nurture many millions as the forests recede before the home-seekers.

His house is a pretty building, comfortably installed, where carefully nurtured old-fashioned flowers grow in a border against the walls, and in little plots of the garden, where Ameou loves to toil. In summer the bumble-bees drowsily buzz among them, and at times a humming-bird flits from hollyhocks to marygolds.

In a neat clapboarded house a bright young woman teaches some of the wisdom of the white men. That of the red is bestowed on them by old Nimissuts and Mashkaugan, who give them lessons in the wonderful lore that is found only in the marvelous book of the great wilderness.



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